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FILM FAME FACT



WARCRAFT: THE BEGINNING

THIS MEANS WAR

ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND **INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE** WE ALWAYS KNEW THEY'D BE BACK **NOW YOU SEE ME 2** BRING YOUR OWN WANDS **THE CONJURING 2** MORE PARANORMAL ACTIVITIES **DISTANCE** PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW **TOP 10** GAMES MOVIES **AND MORE...**

EXCLUSIVE **ASSASSIN'S CREED** + **THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR** GIANT POSTERS INSIDE!

JULY 2016 • ISSUE 77


PG 13
Some Violence
LEGENDARY
BLIZZARD
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TWO WORLDS. ONE DESTINY.
WARCRAFT
THE BEGINNING
IN IMAX 3D & 3D CINEMAS JUNE 9
/GVIPSINGAPORE
#WARORAFTMOVIE
UNIVERSAL

Welcome to our July issue… which is June in your time. What? Get used to it, earthlings, we mighty writers always think we're ahead of our time anyway, hehe.

So, what can you expect at the movies in the month of June? Pretty much everything under our sun and someone else's… And everything in between for the *kiasu* Singaporeans too!

For the gamers, one of the world's biggest and most popular online sensations comes to the big screen with *Warcraft: The Beginning*. So, we got director and co-writer Duncan Jones to tell us more about it. And, along the way, we've also picked out 10 past games movies you may want to check out too.

For the sci-fiers, and nostalgics, 1996's *Independence Day*, with its story of aliens destroying major landmarks and humanity finding a way to fight back, is back with a sequel after 20 years! Returning director Roland Emmerich and lead actor Jeff Goldblum take us through the ups and downs of *Independence Day: Resurgence.* For non-interested parties: how about a chance to witness our iconic three-tower IR being toppled? Yes, we've been up on quite a few Hollywood radars these days…

For the horror fans, the two paranormal investigators are back to work on a different family this time round in *The Conjuring 2*! We have Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga spill all on working on the James Wan-directed spookfest.

For lovers of local fare, there's the Anthony Chen-produced *Distance* – and we speak to Chen Bolin on his three separate roles in the short film trilogy about love and loss. We also hung out with the cast and crew of *Young & Fabulous*, the first Singaporean film set in the world of cosplay.

There are also crowd favourites like magic shows in *Now You See Me 2* – and Woody Harrelson lets us in on some secrets...maybe. Or an amusement park-like film where director James Bobin takes us into the world of Lewis Carroll in *Alice Through The Looking Glass*. Of course, if the above still doesn't satiate your cravings, how about some seafood-sounding delights like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out Of The Shadows* and *Finding Dory*? Hmm…

Check out the full menu inside, and see you at the movies!



Royston Loh
Editor-in-Chief

Royston@sterne-lears.com
FB, IG, Twitter: @RoystonLoh



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For Editorial matters, email us at
Ed@sterne-lears.com

For Sales & Marketing enquiries, email us at
colin@sterne-lears.com

To express your opinions, email us at
F@sterne-lears.com

Publisher/Editor-in-Chief **Royston LOH**
Sub Editor **Balvinder SANDHU**
News Editor/Writer **Jedd JONG**
Contributors **Shawne WANG**
Leslie WONG
Jonathan SUNG
Dennis YEO
Art Director **mKwan**
Senior Designer **YMing**
Managing Director **Wendy CHUA**
Deputy Director **JS LOH**
Business Development **Cornelius (Colin) LOH**

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*** S&M

STARS & MADHATTERS

A SURVIVOR IS REBORN: ALICIA VIKANDER IS THE NEW LARA CROFT LIVE-ACTION *CHAKRA* MOVIE FINDS DIRECTOR **THE BALL IS IN JUSTIN LIN'S COURT FOR *SPACE JAM 2*** mm2 EMBARKS ON FIRST U.S. CO-PRODUCTION ***IN ORDER OF DISAPPEARANCE* FINDS LIAM NEESON** *TRANSFORMERS 5* GETS OFFICIAL TITLE **WAKANDA WELCOMES LUPITA NYONG'O AND MICHAEL B. JORDAN** SHIA LABEOUF WILL HURL RACKETS AS JOHN MCENROE ***APPRENTICE* RECEIVES LARGELY POSITIVE NOTICES AT CANNES** WARNER BROS. ESTABLISHES DC FILMS IN THE WAKE OF *BATMAN V. SUPERMAN* **BATTER UP! HARLEY QUINN TO HEADLINE MOVIE STARRING DC WOMEN** LUCY LIU AND SNOOP DOGG ENTER JAMES FRANCO'S *FUTURE WORLD* **GARETH EDWARDS LEAVES *GODZILLA 2*** FAN BINGBING DIVES INTO *MEG* **MARVEL ANNOUNCES *THOR: RAGNAROK*'S ROCKIN' CAST** JEFF BRIDGES AND TAYLOR KITSCH TO FIGHT FOREST FIRES WITH MILES TELLER AND JOSH BROLIN **LIEV SCHREIBER AND TAYE DIGGS GIDDY-UP FOR *MY LITTLE PONY* MOVIE**

Plus First Look at:
BEAUTY AND THE BEAST INFERNO **ASSASSIN'S CREED** THE ACCOUNTANT **THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN** And More…

GAME ON!

Michael Fassbender plays a career criminal who is plucked from Death Row for some serious virtual simulation in the first look at *Assassin's Creed*



A SURVIVOR IS REBORN: ALICIA VIKANDER IS THE NEW LARA CROFT

Rumours had been circulating that *Star Wars* actress Daisy Ridley was in contention for the role of Lara Croft in the new *Tomb Raider* reboot film. It turns out that Ridley has been beaten to the part by Swedish actress Alicia Vikander, who recently won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her role in *The Danish Girl*. Vikander attracted attention and critical acclaim for her role in the sci-fi drama *Ex Machina*, and will next appear opposite Matt Damon in *Jason Bourne*. Angelina Jolie previously portrayed the adventurer archaeologist in two films. This take will presumably be based on the video game reboot series, kicked off in 2013 by Square Enix. The 2013 game explores Lara's origins, and sees her as a young archaeology student marooned on a remote Japanese island, uncovering the island's supernatural past. It has since been followed up with the sequel game *Rise of the Tomb Raider*. Norwegian director Roar Uthaug (*The Wave*) is set to helm the movie.



LIVE-ACTION *CHAKRA* MOVIE FINDS DIRECTOR



A live-action feature film centring on the superhero Chakra, created by Stan Lee, is now closer to production with a director on board. Lee has selected Vikramaditya Motwane (*Udaan*, *Lootera*) to helm the film. Motwane's directorial debut *Udaan* was selected to compete in the *Un Certain Regard* category at Cannes in 2010. Chakra had previously been the subject of the 2013 animated film *Chakra: The Invincible*. The superhero property was jointly developed by Lee's POW! Entertainment and Indian entertainment company Graphic India. "I'm a fan of Bollywood films and am really excited about launching Chakra the Invincible as my first Bollywood superhero movie," Lee announced in a statement. "Vikramaditya is an amazingly talented filmmaker who I have no doubt can make the *Chakra* film a massive hit in India and around the world. I only hope he remembers to include my cameo!"





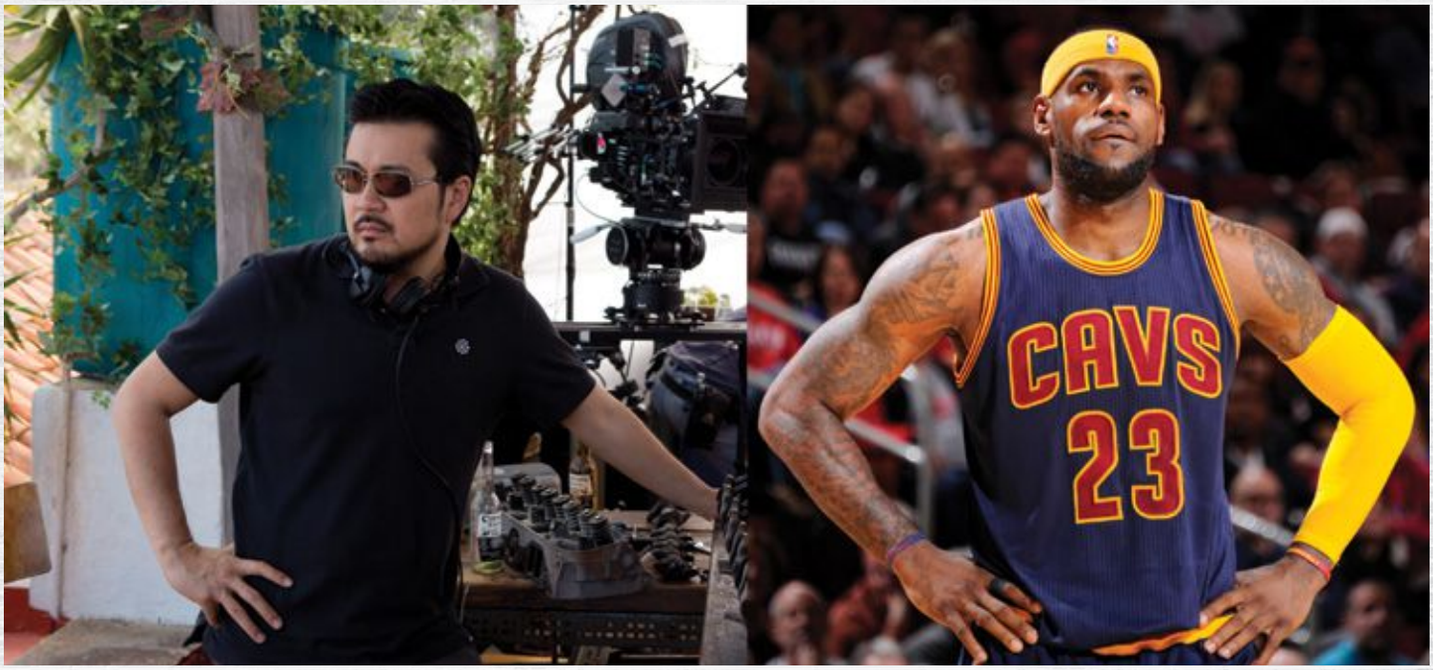
ELLEN PAGE TO BRAVE THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE IN *THE THIRD WAVE*

The living dead continue their rampage through Hollywood, with Ellen Page set to star in an indie zombie thriller entitled *The Third Wave*. The film's premise is that a cure for a zombie epidemic has been found, but the formerly infected humans are now social outcasts, shunned by those around them. The tension that arises leads to military intervention from the government. *The Third Wave* is the directorial debut of Irish director David Freyne and is a follow-up to his 2014 short film, *The First Wave*, which depicts the initial outbreak of the virus. "*The Third Wave* brings an entire new perspective to the zombie genre, which I love," Page said in a press release. "David Freyne truly shifts his lens on society's role in the apocalyptic world. I'm so grateful for this opportunity to share his thoughtful approach to horror with audiences."

mm2 EMBARKS ON FIRST U.S. CO-PRODUCTION

Singaporean production company mm2 Entertainment is dipping its toes into Hollywood with the thriller *Good Match*, a US-Singapore co-production between mm2 and American company BoulderLight Pictures. "*Good Match* will be our first US film co-production and we're excited to take this significant step into the US market," said Melvin Ang, CEO of mm2 Entertainment. The local films produced by mm2 include the *Ah Boys to Men* series, *7 Letters* and *Phua Chu Kang: The Movie. Good Match* is being written and directed by David Chirchirillo, and revolves around a handsome bachelor who comes across an ideal match via a social dating app. However, all is not as it seems with the mystery woman, whose behaviour soon turns dangerously erratic. Production is set to commence in July 2016 for a 2017 release, with BoulderLight handling international sales.





THE BALL IS IN JUSTIN LIN'S COURT FOR *SPACE JAM 2*

Everybody get up, it's time to slam – again. The 1996 live-action/animated flick *Space Jam* is considered a nostalgic favourite by many, with talk of a sequel swirling for years. *Space Jam 2* has now found its director and star: Justin Lin (*Fast and Furious*, *Star Trek Into Darkness*) will helm the sequel, with NBA superstar LeBron James succeeding Michael Jordan. Lin is also co-writing the script alongside Andrew Dodge and Alfredo Botello. In *Space Jam*, Jordan aided Looney Tunes characters in playing a basketball match against villainous intergalactic invaders. James made a cameo in the Amy Schumer-starring comedy *Trainwreck* and was praised for his portrayal of a fictionalised version of himself.



IN ORDER OF DISAPPEARANCE FINDS LIAM NEESON

The Hollywood remake of the Norwegian film *In Order of Disappearance* has set Liam Neeson to star. Neeson will be portraying the role played by Stellan Skarsgård in the original, a dark action-comedy described as akin to *Fargo*. The 2014 film revolves around a snowplough driver whose son is murdered by mobsters who set it up to look like an accidental overdose. The snowplough driver goes from mild-mannered to badass overnight in his brutal quest to avenge his son, with a rival gang being suspected of the killings he carries out. The setting will be changed from the Norwegian tundra to a U.S. ski resort. Hans Petter Moland, who helmed the original, will direct the remake too.

WAKANDA WELCOMES LUPITA NYONG'O AND MICHAEL B. JORDAN

Lupita Nyong'o and Michael B. Jordan have been cast in the solo *Black Panther* movie, joining titular star Chadwick Boseman. The roles have not been specified, though Nyong'o will apparently play the Panther's love interest, with Jordan possibly playing a villain. The Black Panther/T'challa, who is both the king of the fictional African nation Wakanda and a costumed crime-fighter, made his big screen debut in *Captain America: Civil War*. Ryan Coogler is set to direct and is also co-writing the script with Joe Robert Cole. Coogler reunites with Jordan, who starred in his films *Fruitvale Station* and *Creed*. This will be Jordan's second live-action comic book movie role; he played Johnny Storm/Human Torch in 2015's *Fantastic Four* reboot. He also voiced Vic Stone/Cyborg in the animated movie *Justice League: The Flashpoint Paradox*. *Black Panther* will pounce into theatres in February 2018.



NEVER TELL HIM THE ODDS: ALDEN EHRENREICH IS YOUNG HAN SOLO

Ever since Disney announced a standalone *Star Wars* spin-off focusing on the exploits of a young Han Solo, it has become one of the most sought-after roles in Hollywood. A reported 2,500 actors, including Taron Egerton, Jack Reynor, Miles Teller and Ansel Elgort, auditioned for the part. It's now official: Alden Ehrenreich will be stepping into Harrison Ford's leather riding boots. Ehrenreich recently stole the show from his much more famous co-stars in *Hail, Caesar!* and his other credits include *Beautiful Creatures*, *Stoker* and *Blue Jasmine*. In March, Ford jokingly issued this warning to whoever would play young Han Solo: "don't do it."

Ehrenreich was talent-spotted in his youth by Steven Spielberg – Spielberg and Francis Ford Coppola reportedly reached out to *Star Wars* producer Kathleen Kennedy to vouch for Ehrenreich. As with any recasting of any iconic part, there has been a fair amount of negativity on social media in the wake of the announcement. The names behind the scenes should go some way to assuage the reservations: Phil Lord and Chris Miller (*21 Jump Street*, *22 Jump Street*, *The LEGO Movie*) are directing, with the father-son duo of Lawrence and Jon Kasdan penning the screenplay. The elder Kasdan's credits include *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *The Force Awakens*.







APPRENTICE RECEIVES LARGELY POSITIVE NOTICES AT CANNES

Apprentice, the second feature film from Singaporean director Boo Junfeng, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on 16 May 2016. The film, a psychological drama about a young corrections officer who is taken under the wing of the chief prison executioner, was screened in the *Un Certain Regard* category of the prestigious film festival. *The Hollywood Reporter*'s Boyd Van Hoeij wrote, "there's no denying that the country has another formidable filmmaking talent in Boo Junfeng," while praising lead actor Fir Rahman as "impressive".

Screen Daily's Lisa Nesselson described the film as "unsettling" adding, "Tightly focused and ambitious in its multiple themes, the tale touches on how the death penalty radiates out to affect the living."

Variety's international film critic Peter Debruge was more reserved in his praise, calling the film "earnest yet only intermittently engaging".

Writing for U.K. lifestyle site *The Upcoming*, Jasmin Valjas wrote, "The interpersonal dynamics are interesting and the plot reveals itself gradually, well founded and intriguing," but concluded that, "sadly for its critical subject, *Apprentice* doesn't stir up much conversation."

Apprentice is scheduled for a June 30 release in Singapore.

ADAM DRIVER AND OLGA KURYLENKO JOIN *THE MAN WHO KILLED DON QUIXOTE*

Terry Gilliam's passion project *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote*, which he has tried to get off the ground seven times for over more than 15 years, has finally got a new lease of life. The director announced at Cannes that he has cast Adam Driver and Olga Kurylenko, joining Michael Palin. Gilliam's fellow Monty Python member Palin will be playing Don Quixote, while Driver is set to portray a time-travelling ad executive whom Don Quixote believes is actually Sancho Panza, the main character from the original 1605 Cervantes novel. "It's a funny thing. Along the way there have been so many versions of this story in my mind, and it changes with each cast," he said. "Finally we have the perfect cast. Driver is the guy I've been looking for all these years. Thank God for Star Wars, Adam Driver is bankable!" Gilliam hinted that Johnny Depp, who was going to star in the film in 2000, might make a cameo, saying the idea "has crossed my mind". Gilliam is apparently not on good terms with the other Pythons apart from Gilliam, proclaiming "The others are old and miserable. Mike's the nice one," adding that working with the Monty Python team for their 2014 reunion had been "impossible."





MICHAEL KEATON TO PESTER PETER PARKER IN *SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING*





When the title of the upcoming *Spider-Man* movie was announced at CinemaCon, rumours surfaced that Michael Keaton was being considered to play a villainous role in the film. Shortly afterwards, it was confirmed that he was no longer in the running for the as-yet-unrevealed part. Now, Michael Keaton has officially joined *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, with the prevailing speculation being that he is set to play Adrian Toomes a.k.a. The Vulture. The Vulture, an aging inventor who was double-crossed by a business partner and flew down a vengeful path, is a key villain in the Spidey mythos and one of the members of the malevolent alliance known as the Sinister Six. Of course, this wouldn't be the first time Keaton dons a winged costume, after portraying Batman and actor Riggan Thompson from the Oscar-winning *Birdman*. Ben Kingsley and John Malkovich were reportedly considered for the role back when Sam Raimi was planning the fourth film in his *Spider-Man* series. *Spider-Man: Homecoming* swings into theatres in July 2017.

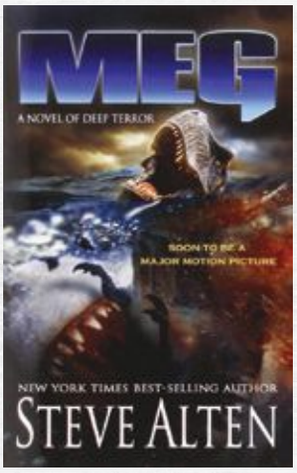


TRANSFORMERS 5 GETS OFFICIAL TITLE

The fifth entry in the live-action *Transformers* movie franchise has had its title revealed – *Transformers: The Last Knight*. The production announcement video featured a still of Optimus Prime's face, followed by the movie's logo. Josh Duhamel is set to return to the series as Special Forces operative Col. Lennox, after sitting out the previous instalment. Mark Wahlberg will reprise the role of Cade Yeager from *Age of Extinction*, and is joined by newcomers Isabela Moner (*100 Things to do Before High School*) and Jerrod Carmichael (*The Carmichael Show*). The title hints at the ancient Knights of Cybertron who flew aboard the Knights' Temenos, the ship which was commandeered by bounty hunter Lockdown. The film is written by Art Marcum and Matt Holloway (*Iron Man*) and Ken Nolan (*Black Hawk Down*). Additional screenplay material comes from a 'writers' room' assembled by Akiva Goldsman, in the vein of the writers' rooms on TV shows. Michael Bay is returning to direct, claiming this will be his final film in the series. *Transformers: The Last Knight* is set for a June 2018 release.



FAN BINGBING DIVES INTO *MEG*



Chinese actress Fan Bingbing has landed a leading role in the sci-fi action-thriller *Meg*, opposite Jason Statham. In the movie based on Steve Alten's 1997 best-seller, Statham plays former Naval Captain and expert diver Jonas Taylor, whose life was forever altered by a near-fatal encounter with a *Cacharadon Megalodon*, the prehistoric ancestor to the Great White Shark. Fan will portray an oceanographer who ropes Taylor in to help out on a dangerous rescue mission in the Marianas Trench, the deepest point in the ocean. Fan's casting is likely due to the fact that *Meg* is being produced by Flagship Entertainment, a joint venture between Warner Bros. and China Media Capital. *Meg* is being directed by Jon Turtletaub (*National Treasure*) and is eyeing a March 2018 release.

GARETH EDWARDS LEAVES *GODZILLA 2*

Director Gareth Edwards, who helmed the 2014 *Godzilla* reboot, will no longer be directing its sequel. Edwards is currently in post-production on *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, and apparently wishes to turn his attention to smaller projects that have been in gestation for some time, instead of tackling big tentpole blockbusters back-to-back. Legendary Pictures are now searching for a new director for *Godzilla 2*, which is slated for a March 2018 release. This was pushed back almost a year from the original Summer 2018 release date. The crossover film *Godzilla vs. Kong* is due in May 2020. Before that, *Kong: Skull Island* will roar into theatres in 2017.

BATTER UP! HARLEY QUINN TO HEADLINE MOVIE STARRING DC WOMEN



The *Suicide Squad* film is still a few months away, but star Margot Robbie and Warner Bros. are thinking ahead. Robbie, who is portraying Harleen Quinzel/ Harley Quinn in *Suicide Squad*, has pitched a *Harley Quinn* spinoff film which she will star in and produce. This is apparently not a Harley Quinn solo film, but an ensemble film showcasing DC's female heroes and villains, with Batgirl and the Birds of Prey as potential members. The Birds of Prey are a superhero team whose members have included the likes of Black Canary, Huntress, Starling, Lady Blackhawk, Katana and Poison Ivy. The Birds of Prey starred in a short-lived 2002 TV series, which also featured Mia Sara as Harley Quinn. Robbie has roped in a writer to help develop the project – said writer's identity is being closely guarded, but we do know she's female. It seems logical that DC would capitalise on the immense popularity of Harley Quinn, and this might be an excellent way to introduce key supporting characters to the DC Extended Universe.







LUCY LIU AND SNOOP DOGG ENTER JAMES FRANCO'S *FUTURE WORLD*

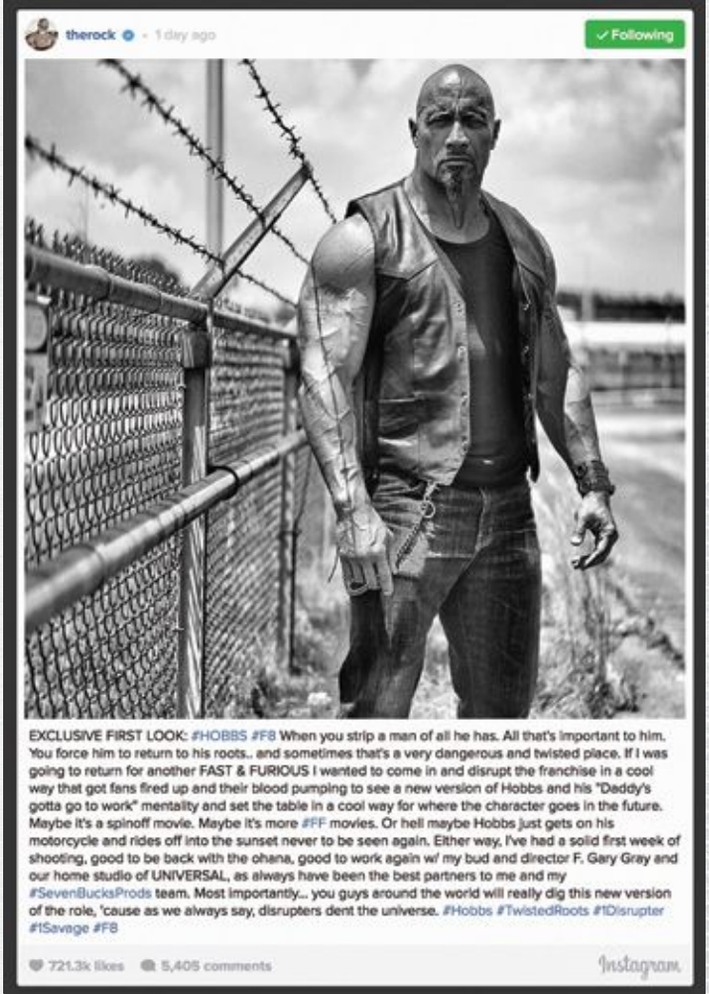
James Franco is assembling quite the eclectic cast for his post-apocalyptic indie thriller *Future World*. Franco will star in the film and co-direct with Bruce Cheung. Cheung and Jay Davis wrote the screenplay, based on an original short story by Franco. Lucy Liu, Snoop Dogg, Method Man and Suki Waterhouse join the already-cast Milla Jovovich. The film centres on a young man of noble birth who, accompanied by a robot bodyguard, sets out on a daring adventure through the harsh world known as the Wastelands. His mission: to retrieve vital medicine for his dying mother. While the nature of Liu's and Dogg's roles are not yet known, Jovovich will be playing a drug lord.



WARNER BROS. ESTABLISHES DC FILMS IN THE WAKE OF *BATMAN V. SUPERMAN*

In the aftermath of the fallout of *Batman v Superman*, which fared disappointingly with critics and did fine albeit not spectacularly at the box office, Warner Bros. has taken action at an executive level. To ensure a stable future for the DC Extended Universe, DC Films has been formed. The new company will be jointly headed by Warner Bros. Executive VP Jon Berg and DC's Chief Creative Officer Geoff Johns. A comic book writer who grew up as an avid DC fan, Johns has been involved with the DC television shows *Smallville*, *Arrow* and *The Flash*. Responding to criticism that *Man of Steel* and *Batman v Superman* have been too grim and self-serious, Johns promised to bring "hope and optimism" to the DC Extended Universe. Prior to this, it seems director Zack Snyder was the de facto creative head of DC's movies. Now, Warner Bros. has officially put in place their equivalent to Kevin Feige, the super-producer chief of Marvel Studios.

INSTAGRAM UPDATE: The Rock Teases Hobbs Spinoff





JEFF BRIDGES AND TAYLOR KITSCH TO FIGHT FOREST FIRES WITH MILES TELLER AND JOSH BROLIN

Jeff Bridges and Taylor Kitsch have joined an as-yet-untitled firefighter drama based on a true story. The cast already includes Miles Teller, Josh Brolin and James Badge Dale. Joseph Kosinski (*Tron: Legacy*, *Oblivion*) is directing the film, which will tell the story of the Granite Mountain Hotshots, a group within Arizona's Prescott Fire Department formed to combat forest fires. In June-July 2013, the Yarnell Hill Fire, ignited by lightning, consumed the forest and claimed the lives of 19 members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots. The memorial service in Prescott drew a crowd of 3,000 and Vice-President Joe Biden famously said "All men are created equal, and then a few become firefighters," in his tribute to the firefighters. The film is produced by Black Label Media, which recently had success with *Sicario*, also starring Josh Brolin.



LIEV SCHREIBER AND TAYE DIGGS GIDDY-UP FOR *MY LITTLE PONY* MOVIE

Live Schreiber and Taye Diggs are saddling up to lend their voices to the *My Little Pony* animated movie. The feature film is based on the popular animated series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. Reprising their roles as the 'Mane Six' ponies from the show are Tara Strong, Ashleigh Bell, Andrea Libman and Tabitha St. Germain, with Rebecca Shoichet, Shannon Chan-Kent and Kazumi Evans as the ponies' singing voices. In the film, a dark force looms over Ponyville and the six main characters must journey beyond the safety of Equestria to save their home with the magic of friendship. Emily Blunt, Kristin Chenoweth, Uzo Aduba and Michael Pena are voicing new characters created for the film. Jayson Thiessen is directing from a script by Meghan McCarthy, a staff writer on the show. The Ponies will trot into theatres in October 2017.



SHIA LABEOUF WILL HURL RACKETS AS JOHN MCENROE

Call it a stroke of good casting: Shia LaBeouf, who in recent years has become known for his performance art antics and brash public displays, has been picked to play famously volatile tennis pro John McEnroe. The biographical sports drama, entitled *Borg/McEnroe*, will delve into one of the most famous sports rivalries of all time. Starring opposite LaBeouf as McEnroe's nemesis Bjorn Borg is Swedish actor Sverrir Gudnason (*A Serious Game*). Stellan Skarsgård has signed on to play Borg's coach Lennart Bergelin. Danish director Janus Metz (*Armadillo*) is helming the project. "This is a very powerful drama that plunges deep into the minds of two extremely interesting personalities living in an explosive era," Metz said while at Cannes with LaBeouf to promote the film. "I am very honoured and excited to be at the reins of it".



MARVEL ANNOUNCES *THOR: RAGNAROK'S* ROCKIN' CAST

There was word that the Hulk would make his next Marvel Cinematic Universe appearance in *Thor: Ragnarok*, and that's now official. Mark Ruffalo was among the cast members confirmed to be in the third standalone *Thor* movie, as stated in a press release from Marvel Studios. Cate Blanchett, who's involvement has been rumoured for some months, is now set to play the supervillainess Hela, the Asgardian goddess of death. Jeff Goldblum will play the Grandmaster, one of the ancient Elders of the Universe and a peerless cosmic manipulator. In addition, Tessa Thompson of *Creed* fame will portray the fearless Asgardian warrior Valkyrie, while Karl Urban is playing Skurge the Executioner, a brutish Asgardian who in the comics is a villain-turned-hero. Returning alongside Chris Hemsworth are Tom Hiddleston as Loki, Idris Elba as Heimdall and Anthony Hopkins as Odin. No word yet on whether Sif or the Warriors Three will be back, though we'd wager at least one of them should figure in the cataclysmic event that is Ragnarok. Taika Waititi is directing the film, and the gods will face their reckoning in November 2017.







BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

A tale as old as time is about to be made brand new. We've gotten our irresistibly tantalising first look at the upcoming live-action remake of Disney's 1991 animated classic, in turn based on the French fairy tale by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. You know how it goes: Belle (Emma Watson) is an irrepressibly bright, free-spirited and beautiful young woman who is taken prisoner by the fearsome Beast (Dan Stevens), formerly a handsome prince who was cursed by an enchantress. She befriends the enchanted objects in the Beast's castle, the Prince's staff who were struck by the same curse, and tries to reach the man behind the monster through kindness and love.





In addition to Watson and Stevens, the cast features Luke Evans as the haughty Gaston, Kevin Kline as Belle's father Maurice, Josh Gad as Gaston's sycophantic lackey LeFou, Emma Thompson as teapot matriarch Mrs. Potts, Ewan McGregor as the candelabra Lumière, Ian McKellen as the fussbudget grandfather clock Cogsworth, Stanley Tucci as the grand piano Cadenza, a new character, Gugu Mbatha-Raw as the feather-duster Babette, Audra McDonald as the Wardrobe and Nathan Mack as Chip.
The film is set to not only include songs from the animated film like the titular tune, *Be Our Guest* and *Belle*, but also the songs composed for the Broadway musical version. Alan Menken and the late Howard Ashman won Oscars for the animated film, and Tim Rice penned the lyrics for the additional songs in the stage musical. Bill Condon (*Dreamgirls*, *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn*) is directing from a screenplay by Evan Spiliotopolous (*The Huntsman: Winter's War*) and Stephen Chbosky (*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*). In its first 24 hours online, the trailer reached 91.8 million views, which topped the number of views seen in that amount of time for the teasers for other Disney-distributed blockbusters such as *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *Captain America: Civil War* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*.







INFERNO

In this thriller based on the fourth novel in Dan Brown's Robert Langdon series, the symbology professor finds himself caught in yet another frantic, high-stakes race against the clock. Tom Hanks returns as Langdon, who awakes in a hospital in Florence stricken with amnesia. Together with Dr. Sienna Brooks (Felicity Jones), Langdon must follow a trail of clues pointing to the epic 14th Century poem Dante's *Inferno*. If Langdon and Brooks fail in their mission, half the world's population will be wiped out by a deadly plague, the work of deranged biotech billionaire Bertrand Zobrist (Ben Foster). The film also stars Omar Sy, Irrfan Khan and Sidse Babett Knudsen.

The Robert Langdon chronology in film vis-à-vis the books is a little confusing: *The Da Vinci Code* was the first movie, based on the second book; *Angels & Demons* was the second movie, based on the first book; and *Inferno* is the third movie, based on the fourth book. Sony passed on an adaptation of the third book *The Lost Symbol* because of its similarities to the plot of *National Treasure*. While Ron Howard was initially reluctant to return to the series, he eventually decided to helm *Inferno*. The screenplay is adapted by David Koepp, who co-wrote *Angels & Demons* with Akiva Goldsman. The gates of hell will be flung open in October 2016.



ASSASSIN'S CREED

The blockbuster video game franchise from Ubisoft finally hits the big screen. Rather than being a direct adaptation of the sprawling storylines across the various games, this film tells an original tale that is set within the world of the games. Michael Fassbender plays Callum Lynch, a career criminal who is plucked from Death Row by shadowy corporation Abstergo Industries. He is forcibly placed into the Animus Project, tapping into his genetic memories to relive the experiences of his ancestor by way of a virtual reality simulation. The ancestor in question is Aguilar de Nerha, a member of the secret society known as the Assassins. The Assassins have been locked in an age-old conflict with the Templars, and Lynch is drawn into this still-ongoing struggle. Marion Cotillard co-stars as Sophia Rikkin, the daughter of Abstergo founder Alan Rikkin (Jeremy Irons). Michael K. Williams plays Moussa, the descendant of a Caribbean Assassin and adept in the use of voudou poison, with Ariane Labed as Maria, an Assassin who fought alongside Aguilar in 15th Century Spain.

While video-game movies have not exactly enjoyed the greatest reputation, *Assassin's Creed* is hoping to turn the tide. The involvement of Academy Award nominee Fassbender as star/producer gives the project a dash of prestige, not to mention the presence of Academy Award winner Cotillard. Both starred in 2015's *Macbeth*, and their director on that film, Justin Kurzel, has reunited with his lead actors on *Assassin's Creed*. The trailer includes plenty of parkour set against 15th Century Spanish cityscapes, juxtaposed with the coldly sinister Abstergo labs. Assassin's Creed leaps into cinemas in December 2016.









THE ACCOUNTANT

Ben Affleck is cooking the books and shooting the crooks in this action thriller. Half-Rain Man, half-Jason Bourne, Affleck plays Christian Wolff: savant financial professional by day, assassin-for-hire by night. Ray King (J.K. Simmons), the head of the Treasury Department's Crime Enforcement Division, closes in on the enigmatic accountant as Christian takes on a legitimate client: a company specialising in cutting-edge robotics, where accounting clerk Dana Cummings (Anna Kendrick) has stumbled upon a discrepancy involving millions of dollars. As Christian gets closer to uncovering the truth, his enemies start catching up with him and Dana. The film also stars Jon Bernthal, Cynthia Addai-Robinson andJeffrey Tambor.

Accounting is not normally thought of as a particularly badass profession, but it seems this film is out to change that perception in an explosive way. The screenplay for *The Accountant* landed on the 2011 Black List of best-liked unproduced scripts making the rounds in Hollywood. Screenwriter Bill Dubuque (*The Judge*) spent 12 years as a corporate headhunter before becoming a screenwriter. This film will see Affleck and Simmons share the screen ahead of next year's *Justice League*, in which Affleck reprises his role of Batman with Simmons as the Dark Knight's trustworthy ally Commissioner Gordon. Anna Kendrick based her character on her own mother, who went over the script and explained the maths to her daughter. Numbers (and bones) will get crunched come October 2016.















THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

The classic 1960 western *The Magnificent Seven*, itself a remake of Kurosawa's 1954 masterpiece *The Seven Samurai*, is getting an action-packed remake boasting some serious star power. Denzel Washington is leading the charge as bounty hunter Sam Chisolm, with his posse consisting of Josh Farraday (Chris Pratt), a gambler with a penchant for explosives; sharpshooter Goodnight Robicheaux (Ethan Hawke), trapper Jack Horne (Vincent D'Onofrio), assassin Billy Rocks (Lee Byung-hun), outlaw Vasquez (Manuel Garcia-Rulfo) and Comanche warrior Red Harvest (Martin Sensmeier). They're up against the diabolical Bartholomew Bogue (Peter Sarsgaard), who has been terrorising the town of widowed frontierswoman Emma Cullen (Haley Bennett), leading her to engage Chisolm's services. Matt Bomer, Luke Grimes, Sean Bridgers, Billy Slaughter, Cam Gigandet and Vinnie Jones round out the ensemble.

Antoine Fuqua re-teams with oft-collaborator Washington, whom he directed to a Best Actor Oscar in *Training Day* and who was also his leading man for *The Equalizer*. Fuqua had to convince Washington to take the role, since original star Yul Brenner had left big spurred boots to fill. Washington chose to sport dramatic sideburns for the role, which turned heads when he showed up to the 2015 Manny Pacquiao-Floyd Mayweather fight. "We went to that boxing match in Vegas, and people were seeing Denzel with the chops and were like, 'What's going on?' " Fuqua told *USA Today*. "I was saying to myself, 'Wait till they see him in full glory.' He looks great. Denzel just locked into that look." Pratt was so excited to work on the film that the hellish weather didn't faze him. "It'd be 110 degrees and even the horses wouldn't do what you wanted them to do," Fuqua recalled. "I'd check in and ask Chris, 'You good?' And he'd say, 'Let's do this baby, I'm in a Western.'" The boys ride into town in September 2016.





*** WTF

WE TALK FILMS

ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS
Director James Bobin

NOW YOU SEE ME 2
Woody Harrelson

WARCRAFT
Director Duncan Jones

TOP 10
Games Movies

THE CONJURING 2
Patrick Wilson & Vera Farmiga

YOUNG & FABULOUS
Cast & Crew

DISTANCE
Chen Bolin

MADE IN ASIA
5 Classic Animated Films

NETFLIX
The New Frontier

And More...

INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE

It has been 20 years, but we always knew they'd be back!





ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

Director James Bobin takes us into the world of Lewis Carroll in *Alice Through The Looking Glass*

James Bobin is a British director who was behind the camera for *The Muppets* and *Muppets Most Wanted*.

Before that, he was best known for his TV work, as the creator, writer and director of *Da Ali G Show*, and as the creator, writer and executive producer of *Flight Of The Conchords*.

His latest project is *Alice Through The Looking Glass*, a follow-up to Tim Burton's *Alice In Wonderland* in 2010. Here, he talks about what it's like taking over from Burton, how much Lewis Carroll is part of his culture, and what it was like introducing new characters into the movie.



Tell us what originally attracted you to the project.

Lewis Carroll's work is everywhere in English culture, and if you are English, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is part of your DNA. We grew up with Alice, so she's been around for a very long time and is very familiar to me. I think it was an incredible achievement of Carroll's to have created a character like Alice who embodied a particular time period from the past but who was also so ahead of her time. Alice is very forward-thinking and almost out of place because she's a strong character in a very patriarchal, Victorian society…sort of a modern woman in an old-fashioned society. So it was because I knew Alice so well and saw this as an amazing opportunity to become a part of this incredible legacy. It was a real honor to be asked and I'm delighted to be a part of it.

Why do you think Tim Burton's film was so successful and what excited you about being able to continue the story?

Tim Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* was a spectacular production. His films always have such a unique vision and style and people were curious to see what he would do with a story from the mind of Lewis Carroll. We've all seen versions of *Alice in Wonderland* before, like the classic Disney 1951 animated film, but Tim gave his film such an interesting, dark, gothic feel which is very Victorian in its own way. When you combine that with a story that showed Alice in this kind of dark prism and which was fantastic and beautifully put together, it obviously appealed to audiences. This film is a continuation of that story to a degree, and I have tremendous respect for Tim's work and was excited by the prospect of taking elements from his movie and pushing it forward by introducing new characters, new ideas and new worlds. I'm from the comedy world and I believe Carroll is one of the earliest satirists. The combination of political commentary plus satire plus absurdism is pure English humour and I wanted to bring elements of that to this story.

Tell us what the story is about.

Our story takes place three or four years after the first film but it is not based on Lewis Carroll's book *Through the Looking-Glass*. The book is essentially an allegory of a chess match spread out over eight chapters in which Alice eventually becomes queen, but it is also eight chapters that bear no relation to one another… they're completely random, bizarre, weird episodes in his life and it's really dark and very odd.

Our film tells a new story which has elements from both books but it's really much more about the characters from the first film and what's happened to them since, as well as what happened to them in the past. It starts with Alice returning from three years at sea, where, as part of the merchant navy, she explored various parts of the Far East. She is a sea captain, which was almost unheard of back then, and she is grown up, so our story is more about the idea of what a woman's role is in society and what Alice represents in those terms.

Alice Liddell, who Lewis Carroll based his books on, was born in the 1850s, as was Emmeline Pankhurst, the founder of the suffragette movement. Carroll saw Alice as a typical member of this new generation of women who were looking to take on a bigger role in society, and it was a brilliant idea on his part. When Alice goes back home she finds herself in a slightly awkward position because her mother is part of the older generation which believed that every young woman should get married and that women cannot be a sea captain. Alice sees a conflict in that, and it is that conflict which drives her back to Underland. She feels out of place in the contemporary Victorian world and believes that her only real friends are in Underland.

As Alice is having a sort of crisis about what is going to happen in her future, the Hatter is having a crisis of his own, and a messenger from Underland comes to get her. The messenger takes the form of a butterfly, whom you may remember as Absolem, the caterpillar from *Alice in Wonderland*, so she returns and her friends tell her how she can help. Alice must travel back in time to Horunvendush Day, and needs to borrow the Chronosphere from Time (Sacha Baron Cohen) in order to do so. When he refuses to loan it to her, Alice steals the Chronosphere, greatly upsetting Time, who then sets off after her.



Talk about Alice as played by Mia Wasikowska.

I am so thrilled that Mia is Alice. If I had been casting the role I would have chosen her, too. Alice is the central character in the story and it is a very multi-faceted role to play, but Mia is strong and so very good at playing roles with complex emotions. She is the film's anchor and she brilliantly grounds Alice in this Victorian world. Alice is us, she is the audience, and we view everything through her.

How has Johnny Depp's character, the Hatter, changed since we last saw him?

The Hatter is on hard times and Johnny has to play him as a sensible grownup who is still somewhat mad, which is very difficult to do. It is hard to be sensible and mad at the same time, but Johnny carries it off brilliantly. The Hatter really is the other central character besides Alice who we really care about in the film and really want to see happy. We see him as his normal self in a flashback when he is a young man, which is a different tone for his character because it's just a degree of madness. We know the Hatter was driven mad by excessive mercury poisoning, but in this story we learn more about his family's history, which is key to finding out what actually happened to them. From the first film we were led to believe that his family perished on Horunvendush Day because the Hatter was unable to save them. This is very complex for him emotionally, and it's the spark of hope that they may not be dead which begins to drive him insane.

Talk about the sisters Iracebeth and Mirana, played by Helena Bonham Carter and Anne Hathaway.

One of the great things about having a second film is that the actors already know their characters so well. At the same time, we wanted to challenge them to look at different aspects of their characters, where they came from, etc. It's a great starting point for the actors to be able to go deeper. Iracebeth, the Red Queen, is larger-than-life and is brilliantly played by Helena Bonham Carter. She is just spectacular in the role and she really understands her. Iracebeth has a very large head (almost twice the size of her body), and in this film we learn that it is the result of something that happened in her past. We find out more about her relationship with her sister and her parents, and it becomes a question of what makes someone a bad person? Is it nature versus nurture? Is it circumstantial? When we see Iracebeth, there's a lot more going on inside her huge head…she isn't just this 'off with her head' crazy, obsessive person like she was before. Anne Hathaway is just so lovely and fantastic as Mirana, the White Queen. Mirana has a great aura and sense of calmness about her, while at the same time a vague sense of malevolence, which is really interesting to see. There's a sort of turmoil beneath her calmness that she's learned to control herself…she is, after all, the Red Queen's sister. They are of the same blood, so this calmness is something she struggles to maintain.

How was it working with Tim Burton as a producer? Can you talk about the differences between the two films?

Tim was the perfect collaborator. He has such good ideas and such strong viewpoints about what this world should and could be, but at the same time he gave me a great deal of freedom. In Tim's film the story included things from both of Lewis Carroll's books. For example, Iracebeth's pet, the Jabberwocky, and Tweedledee and Tweedledum, were featured in *Alice in Wonderland*, but neither one was actually from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, but the Looking-Glass book instead. I was looking for new ideas and new characters that weren't in the second book and wanted to add a new character, a villain, as well. Iracebeth is fantastic, obviously, but I thought it would be fun to have someone to back her up.

Time, our new character, was very much Carroll's idea, not mine. In his first book when Alice meets Hatter for the first time, he's stuck and can't move and says, "I'm stuck perpetually at tea time, because last March, Time and I had a quarrel," and so we thought that was a good idea for a character. Time becomes the bad guy, which is perfect, because the last person you want to annoy is the man who controls time, but he is also fallible and has very human foibles and an Achilles heel of love. Time is a very pompous, arrogant, self-opinionated buffoon, so I turned to my great friend, Sacha Baron Cohen, who is all of those things as an actor. Sacha is excellent at playing the confident idiot, and a confident idiot is my favorite type of character. I also wanted to make this unbelievably powerful person somewhat petty and a little bit annoying and a little bit lonely, too. He lives in a gigantic castle by himself for all eternity, which gives him a slight tragic nature as well. Time himself is very mechanical, as he is part machine and steam-driven.

We also meet the Hatter's family, who are actually a very large part of this story, particularly the Hatter's father (Rhys Ifans), who is not at all like his son. His father is the milliner in town and is always very serious. Their relationship kind of mirrors that of Alice and her mother, as they too have a complicated relationship, and part of this story is how Hatter and his father come to reconcile. Most of the faces audiences remember from the first film are back again as I was very keen to not mess with those characters, as they are so beautifully played and help to create a cohesive universe.

Can you talk about the concept of time travel and why it's important to this story?

Our story has an element of time travel, the idea being that time travel is actually possible in Underland due in part to the Chronosphere, a machine belonging to Time which he can use to fix problems in the past. Having time travel in the story makes the film a prequel and a sequel at the same time because we can go into the characters' backstories. Alice borrows this Chronosphere from Time to service her own needs. The Hatter is in trouble, and only by traveling back in time will Alice be able to save him.

We see younger versions of many of the characters at different ages and find out what really caused them to turn out the way they did, and that's always fascinating to me…learning why people are the way they are. You can't change the past…it is what it is. The future can be anything but the past is the past. Don't touch it, and I think that's what Alice learns: that you can't change the past but if you are careful you can learn from it.

Was it important for you to bring back members of the original creative team?

The creative team from Tim Burton's film did extraordinary work and I wanted to pay respect to Burton's gothic style and sensibility. But at the same time we wanted to find new worlds to play with and new sets to build, which is what we did. Obviously this film still has a huge amount of CG effects, but I'm very much a fan of the tactile environment. I love the idea of actors interacting with sets and think it's nice for them to be able to pick up something and really see and feel what it is…it helps in so many ways.

So we actually built a number of major sets like the town of Witzend, which is a key setting for several significant events that take place in our story. Our production designer Dan Hennah is someone I've wanted to work with for a long time. He did all the Hobbit movies with Peter Jackson and in *The Desolation of Smaug* he built a town called Lake Town which, in the book, is a fantastically beautiful town, literally on stilts on a lake. On screen it looks so utterly charming and is exactly how I pictured it in the book, so I knew this was the man to build the town of Witzend for us. He did a fantastic job creating new environments like Time's castle and Iracebeth's castle, which are both enormous in scale. His work is just phenomenal.

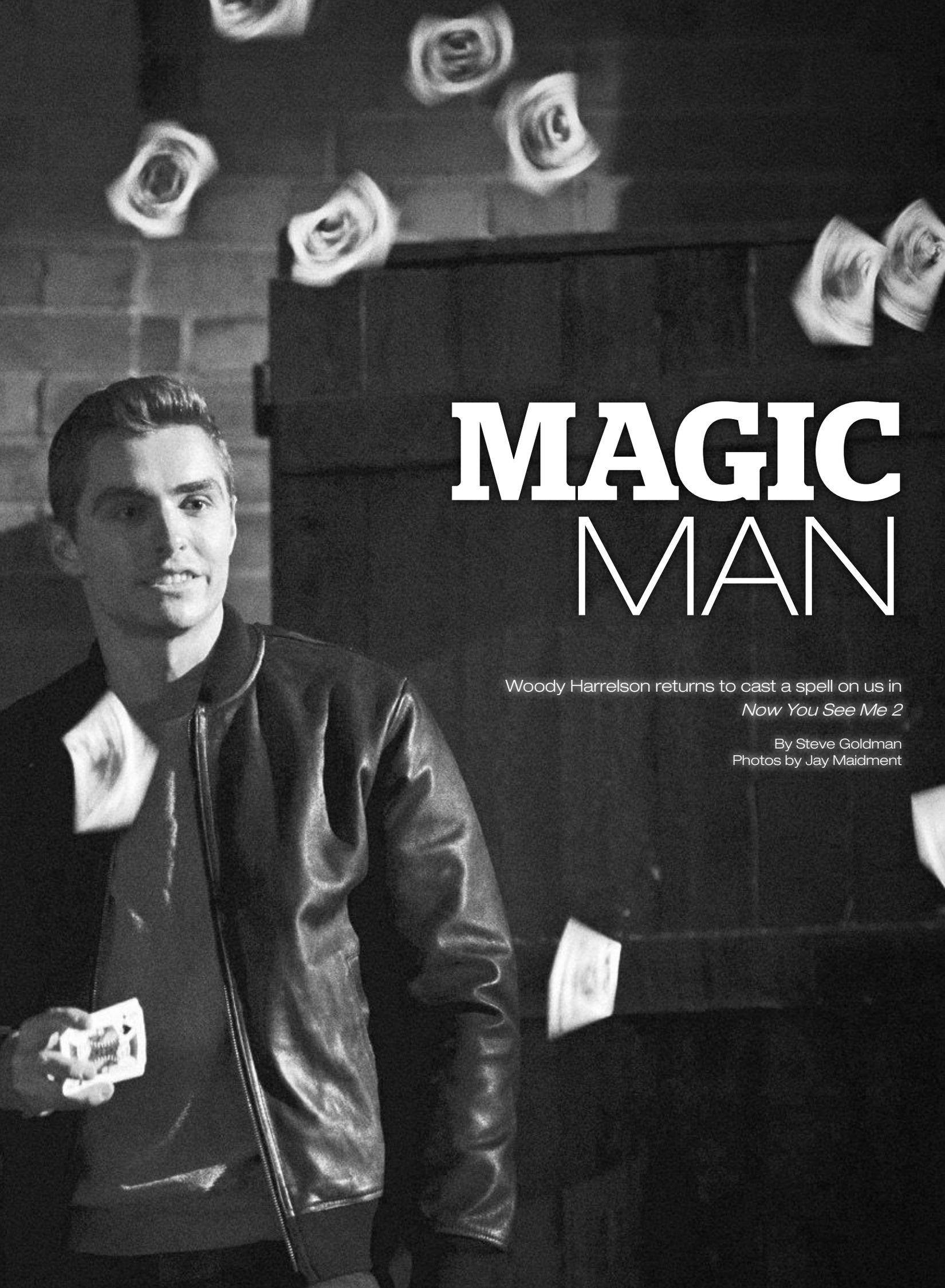
In terms of costume design, we were incredibly fortunate to welcome back Colleen Atwood, who won an Oscar® for her work on *Alice in Wonderland*. I was desperate to have her because she's so fantastic and I've been a big fan of hers for a very long time. Her sense of history and fantasy are just spot-on. We would have a brief conversation about ideas for a particular costume and she would immediately understand what I was looking for and was able to pull it together. Colleen's references are fantastic and her library, spectacular. She'll spend hours poring over books looking for inspiration, and with Colleen it's all about detail. She is truly a genius.

What can fans of *Alice in Wonderland* expect with this film?

Alice is always involved in adventure. She's sort of the calm centre in a world of craziness and is very much a person who lives this incredible life both upstairs (upstairs being Victorian England) and downstairs (downstairs being Underland). It's an adventure…it's a quest. Underland is a beautiful place to spend an-hour-and-a-half of your time, and you'll learn something about humanity at the same time.







MAGIC MAN

Woody Harrelson returns to cast a spell on us in *Now You See Me 2*

By Steve Goldman
Photos by Jay Maidment

In *Now You See Me 2*, Woody Harrelson stars as hypnotist Merritt McKinney, founding member of 'The Four Horseman', a merry band of magicians who took their cue from Robin Hood in their initial outing, ultimately emptying the bank account of their unwitting benefactor (Michael Caine's 'Arthur Tressler') into the pockets of their ever loyal fans



Following on the success of the first film (earning over $350 million at the box office in 2013), *Now You See Me 2* reunites Harrelson with his magical partners in crime (Jesse Eisenberg, Dave Franco and newcomer Lizzy Caplan) for a second mind-bending adventure – this time elevating the limits of stage illusion to new heights in the hopes of clearing their names and exposing the ruthlessness of a dangerous tech magnate. The sequel also sees Harrelson joined by returning cast members Morgan Freeman (as Thaddeus Bradley) and Mark Ruffalo (as Dylan Rhodes), along with *NYSM*-newbies, Daniel Radcliffe (as Tressler's son, Walter) and Taiwanese musical superstar, Jay Chou (as Li).

Born in Midland Texas, Woody Harrelson got his start on the popular '80s sitcom, *Cheers*, for which he scored five Emmy nominations and one win. His films include: *White Men Can't Jump, Kingpin, Natural Born Killers, Zombieland,* Oscar-nominated turns in *The People vs. Larry Flynt* and *The Messenger*, and most recently, *The Hunger Games* franchise. On television, Harrelson starred in the 2014 HBO crime drama, *True Detective,* for which he received his seventh Emmy nomination.

We spoke with Woody Harrelson about the making of his new film, *Now You See Me 2,* at The Four Seasons hotel in Los Angeles.

What initially attracted you to the world of *Now You See Me*?

I just thought it was a really interesting, unique idea to have a magician-heist thriller. I'd never seen that before. I mean that's not a tapped-out genre, if you know what I mean. [*laughs*] I thought it was pretty interesting. I'd met Jesse (co-star Jesse Eisenberg) one day in New York at a restaurant. We were just hanging out and he mentioned this project and said he was hoping I'd be interested in playing one of the parts. I was like, "Dude, I'd be interested in *anything* you're doing. Send it over." That's when I got to read it and I thought, "You know, this could be something really special."

Were you surprised by how successful the first film was?

Yes. I think everybody was. I don't think anyone had any idea it was going to be *that* big.

Why do you think that was?

It's one of those things that's hard to explain. You never really know what it is that galvanises an audiences' appreciation of a project. Is it these interesting characters? That's got to be a component. The story? The way it was shot? I don't know. Somehow, all of it came together. But I do think that there's a universal fascination with magic, which I think helped us too.

What was it like working with Jesse Eisenberg, again?

Great… Jesse is an actor who relentlessly tries to do his best and make each scene as good as it can be. He's a real team player. He comes up with great ideas and great adlibs. It's a real joy to work with Jesse and I love him as a person. I also think he's one of the few true geniuses in the world. You know he's an *actual* genius. I just hope I keep working with that guy forever.

You have some new cast members joining you this time as well. How did you break the ice with all the newcomers – Daniel Radcliffe, Lizzy Caplan…?

Well, we do what we always do. We have a big party. [*laughs*] Everybody gets acquainted and by the end of the night, everybody's friends.

What was the shoot itself like?

It was a long shoot, but it was fun. Of course, we were in London during winter – which isn't their most pleasant season. [*laughs*] But there's something I loved about being there. I didn't always feel that way, but I think there are some pretty special people there. I think that's what makes any place great – the people.

Were you into magic as a kid?

Yes… I remember doing a magic show one time. I did one thing where I was pouring milk inside this paper cone. And then at the end of it, you slap the cone, and there's no milk in there. Of course the cone was slightly lower than the level of what you could see so it was pretty obvious, I'm sure, to my mum and whoever else was watching... [*laughs*] But I was always fascinated by it. And I still love it. I love hypnotism and mentalism too. David Blane is a good buddy of mine and he's a pretty fascinating guy.

Did he give you any pointers?

No, he didn't give me any advice. But I think he's glad that the first film did well and he likes the fact that I'm playing a mentalist.

Tell us about your character, Merritt McKinney, and how he's evolved in the new film?

When we come into this present film, we're all kind of on the lamb because of what we did in the first movie. The FBI and everyone are still tracking us. And so we're just waiting to get back to work, back to what we love to do. That's where we start off… And I do think







my character grows a bit in this second film, in terms of his whole acceptance of what's happened in the past, his acceptance of the present and the people that he's with. I feel like he's a bit of a loner who finally gets to like company – the company of these other horsemen.

Did you work with any actual magicians to prepare for the film?

I worked with Keith Barry, the Irish mentalist. He was *really* helpful. He taught me a lot of different, cool tricks. I truly believe that that kind of prep really does help.

Tell us about your new director on N*ow You See Me 2*, Jon Chu.

Doing a sequel, you definitely want to be in the best hands. I met Jon in Berlin a-year-and-a-half ago – Jeez, I guess even more than that now. But he was great. I thought he was really smart. Really on top of things. When you see the movie, you'll see there are a zillion moving parts in this thing. There's so much going on. And he just had the overview of what needed to happen. He was always open to making scenes better and trying things out… Real confident. Young guy. He really did a hell of a job. Very talented.

What was the biggest challenge making the film?

I think the biggest challenge was the popularity of the first film itself. With a sequel, you really want to do something great. You want it to be better than the first one, which I think it is, by the way – I actually think it is better than the first one. But the worry that it might not be as good, that it might fall flat somehow – that was the only real thing. And that wasn't really a pressing thing in my consciousness.

What was it like seeing the finished film for the first time?

It was fantastic. It was so good…. I brought a bunch of my friends to see it and they freaking *loved it*. My daughter, who is nine years old, came up and said, "That's your best film yet, Daddy." I was like, "You don't know how much that means to me." I was really psyched about how this turned out. I have to say – Jon Chu and the whole team just did an amazing job.

Now You See Me 2 opens on 16 June 2016.



THIS MEANS WAR

Director and co-writer Duncan Jones brings one of his favourite games, *Warcraft*, to the big screen



One of the world's biggest and most popular online sensations comes to the screen with *Warcraft*. In this thrilling fantasy adventure, the human realm of Azeroth is threatened when an army of Orcs shows up, fleeing the destruction of their own world.



The scene is seemingly set for a huge conflict until two unlikely allies find common ground. Can all-out war actually be avoided, especially when there are powerful forces on both sides pushing for battle?

Duncan Jones is the respected director of 2009's *Moon* and 2011's *Source Code*. Having shot many short films and commercials, he now makes the leap to a bigger stage with *Warcraft*, bringing years of enthusiasm for the game and a keen eye for characters and story to the movie.

Jones explains why he wanted to try something new, his approach to a very different type of fantasy and his experience putting a dog in a performance capture suit…

Why *Warcraft?*

I'd only done two films at the time, both science fiction, with *Moon* and *Source Code*. I know it's too early to worry about being typecast, but just as far as the projects that were being offered to me, there was an awful lot of sci-fi coming through and not much else, which I'm very happy with – it's nice to be wanted! – but I am also a big fantasy fan, and a big *Warcraft* fan. And that opportunity to get involved with something very different from what I'd done before and work in the big tent was something I was really looking forward to, so I leapt at the chance.

It does seem a lot of directors are making this leap. So what made you take it? And what did you want to bring?

There had been nibbles, and there are some well-known, established franchises that I was being asked about. If I was going to do one of these, I've made it clear that I really wanted to be there at the start of it, rather than adding on to something that someone else had already done. And *Warcraft* is something I was very familiar with and loved. It was a fantasy, which was that big boon for my interest, because I grew up reading sci-fi and a lot of fantasy. It really just felt like the perfect fit. It was a chance to lay out this universe in a filmic way that no one else had had the chance to do yet.

People had tried to make it before. But you had a different vision for it...

Absolutely. What Peter Jackson did with bringing fantasy to a huge new audience... I do not believe that all the people who showed up to watch *Fellowship Of The Ring* had read Tolkien. I don't think that's the case! And what he did is he brought this audience, through the sumptuousness and the newness of the visuals of it, and then the storytelling as people started to know what the film was about. And that's what I hope to do with *Warcraft*, is to create or at least show this visual universe that the fans of the game know so well, but lay it out for both audiences, so fans can feel like they've come home and people who don't know anything about it are invited to something new.

Were there things you knew you had to get into the film? And what can fans of the game expect from it?

There's a word that Chris Metzen at Blizzard uses a lot, which is 'retconning', the idea of taking pre-existing stories and simplifying or making tweaks or making adaptions which take into account the decades of lore that there has been in the *Warcraft* universe, and sometimes there are things which don't actually gel or go together after 20 years of storytelling. We wanted to make those adjustments and at the same time make the changes that are necessary to make it work as a film.



Did you draw inspiration from other sources?

A couple of things just for fun, but the *Lord Of The Rings* films were absolutely an influential piece of work in fantasy that we knew we were going to be measured by. We knew that we wanted to differentiate ourselves, so part of our design and practice was to find ways to make sure that we've met that level and at the same time were our own creature. And the fact that our story revolves around humans and Orcs where there are heroes on both sides already did a lot of the heavy lifting on that side, but there's also a visual side to it, an aesthetic where Blizzard games have this rich, sumptuousness and vibrancy of colour and this condensed, small world that everything takes place in. Which again, when we were able to portray it on screen, that was a matter of having multiple environments visible in individual establishing shots, you'd have a forest and a bit of desert and a bit of something else all in the same panorama, I think that again created this small world which differentiates it from what Peter Jackson did.

And there will be easter eggs for big fans to spot?

Oh, so much, yeah. For the fans, I'm going to be greedy here, but multiple watches are in order, because there is so much buried in the background of the film... actually in the foreground, middle-ground and background, everywhere. There are so many easter eggs and so much richness there to catch up on... There's going to be a lot of fun for the fans.

What were you looking for in terms of casting?

With the writing in the script, it was really about, how do we create enough time on screen and enough chemistry between the characters and enough gravity of what the goal, the mission for them within that timeframe to still have an ensemble on the human side and another one on the Orc side? So we really have two groups of characters that have to be realised in quick, strong brushstrokes.

Travis (Fimmel) is a fantastic actor, very physically able having come off the back of the *Vikings* TV show where he does a lot of horsemanship, swordsmanship, all the physical things that you'd want your hero to be able to do, so he was a very quick and comfortable convert from the work he'd done before into our universe as Lothar. And then we surrounded him with a great group of actors, including dominic cooper and paula patton, who i had seen in *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol* and thought she has this incredible presence. Again, very physical and we brought her in to be Garona, a character who straddles both worlds. Then people like Ben Foster, an amazing character actor, Ben Schnetzer, a young up-and-coming American who does an uncannily good British accent, although in our film he has an American accent! So just this rich cast of great character actors rather than looking for big names, because the universe is the star in this movie and we just wanted good actors who could play the roles to fit into it.

And you went the performance capture route for the Orcs, and you had Toby Kebbell in, who has some experience with that...

We wanted to make sure we had a couple of people on the Orc side who had experience doing motion capture before we started bringing people in who were less familiar with it. So obviously toby had that from the *Planet Of The Apes* movies and we also brought in Terry Notary - movement and performance capture expert, who has done everything,



an Andy Serkis type, someone who has all the experience. And then we brought in new people who had never done it before, like Rob Kazinsky (as Orgrim Doomhammer), who was an absolute natural. Anna Galvin, an Australian actress, so good in it as Draka. Totally got it and went for it, had no embarrassment factor about the silver pajamas or any of that. Clancy Brown as Blackhand... The Kurgan from *Highlander*! That guy... Him in the silver suit.

Everyone just went for it. And it's funny, all of the ego that you might normally have as an actor is stripped away when you put those suits on, and that team of Orcs, that group of actors who were our Orcs, they had such a comfort level with each other and I think they had so much fun. I think they probably had more fun than anyone else on the shoot.

Did they go through Orc school?

Terry ran an Orc school. He worked with all of our actors. He worked with Daniel Wu, who plays Gul'dan, who had a very distinct way of moving. So he and Daniel really worked to nail that physical language. We had an amazing stunt team who ended up playing a lot of the background Orcs and they even let me get into the pajamas for a while, just to experience it! There's no performance, I don't appear in the movie, but it's hard work and really builds up your legs.

So there's no Alfred Hitchcock moment where you cameo as an Orc?

No! But if they let me do a Warcraft 2, I'm absolutely getting in there as a mocap character, for sure!

How was it for you, as a director, working with this technology?

I had had an experience on a commercial with a whippet in motion capture. I did an advert for Carling Beer in the UK and we wanted a robot dog. We were like, "We should motion capture a whippet..." And we did! It probably wasn't necessary, but it was fun and it was my first taste of mocap. But this was a whole different thing, no whippets involved, and it was a lot of fun.

Is it an interesting process, being able to have the actors perform, but being able to change and shift it how you like?

I think the best results really come out of being able to have motion capture performed within the visual environment that you're planning to have in the movie itself. Gavin Bouquet, our production designer, built so many extraordinary sets that most of the time our motion capture was shot on site. We'd shoot a performance with a live-action actor and a motion-capture actor, we would get everything in camera, then we'd shoot clean plates without the motion capture actor so that we would be able to replace them with their finished character. So most of the time the performances were taking in place in the location where they would be in the film.

Was it a mixture of practical sets and some locations?

A little bit of location, not as much as maybe we might have chosen, but I think it gave us control and it also gave us an opportunity to visually create something that was a little super-real, there's a kind of hyperrealism to *Warcraft* in the game that we were trying to capture in a way that felt like it could exist in a real universe, so we went with set builds as opposed to looking for live-action environments.

It was another opportunity to find a way to differentiate ourselves from what Peter Jackson had done on the Lord Of The Rings movies. They had such amazing and beautiful live-action environments and locations in New Zealand and there is a different aesthetic to the *Warcraft* universe. It's a small world and there's something different about it - the trees are supersized, but you go from a forest to a desert in 10 seconds. How do we create that? So we decided to build sets and it gives it a different feel.

How was it working on something at this scale





with such a huge schedule?

If there's anything that I would say was the biggest challenge for me about this movie is the marathon of it. It's maintaining the focus, the discipline to demand quality for three-and-a-half years. You're always pushing to maintain that level that you originally wanted and maintain the quality throughout the film, even though shots are trickling over for a-year-and-a-half.

Was there anything you couldn't do this time?

Always. I would love to know what James Cameron would think about that because if there's anyone who has the opportunity to make anything he wants, it's him! But I wouldn't be surprised if even he says that there are certain things that he didn't get the chance to do. Certainly on this film there is always the opportunity and the hunger to go beyond what you have the time and the money or even the story to do. So yeah, if the audience likes the movie enough to give us a chance to take another crack at it, there's lots, lots more we would love to try.

That speaks to a potential future for the film. You've talked about a trilogy? Even a TV series... Technology is changing all the time, so as far as the lower budget interpretations of this, or whether it could work on TV, maybe it could? I don't know, things are moving so fast that who knows when mocap will be in TV, maybe it will be possible. Certainly going back to our movie and the potential for three movies… Chris Metzen, who writes the stories at Blizzard, and I have talked about what those first three films could be. We've very much set up something that I think would work very nicely as a contained trilogy, but *Warcraft* has 20 years of storytelling behind it, so if there is the appetite, there are plenty of places to go with it. I think the biggest difficulty – and hopefully we got in there just in time – is as the studios keep adding big tentpole, recurring franchises, is where's the room in the schedule? That becomes the biggest challenge! Between all the Marvel, the Star Wars, the DC movies and all of the others, where are the free weekends to put new stories?

A key character is the baby Orc. How was that created? Surely not a baby in mocap!

No, that was a combination of the amazing work of ILM and their attention to detail. And a tremendous voice artist who specialises in children and babies. That is their unique skill, and that was a lot of fun.

How was it for you, as a fan of Warcraft, to walk on set and see things brought to life?

Every phase of it was, "Oh my god I'm working in the big time now." Right from the initial flood of designs that came through. Because on a film like this, all the departments are big, it's not one or two people desperately trying to get you the things you need, it's a huge team delivering multiple iterations and versions of everything you need and more. It's phenomenal, and every time something gets delivered or you get to the next version of something, or you see a set being built, or the finished set, every time I thought it was incredible and I couldn't believe I was there. I had a little bit of an experience growing up, because I had the chance to be on some film sets and it was that experience of being on *Labyrinth* or something like it that just made me so hungry and excited to maybe one day be on a set like that, and *Warcraft* has had that in spades.

You are famous, in both of your films so far, for sneaking Chesney Hawkes music in there. How do you get that into Warcraft?

Let me tell you... That footage exists. The music exists. I don't know if it will be in the theatrical cut of the movie, which breaks my heart. But I understand. If there's ever a chance for an extended version or a director's cut, I'll put it back in. It's so funny and it's so wrong, it's right! Hopefully it'll sneak out into the universe.

World Of Warcraft

A rundown of who's who in the *Warcraft* universe



Garona

A slave of the orc Warlock Gul'dan, Garona is a stunning half-orc who is born of two worlds but belongs in neither. Broken bones heal stronger, and Garona's are stronger than you could ever imagine. She is a survivor. An outcast caught between two worlds, Garona fights for acceptance and a place to belong. She has turned suffering into strength to become a self-sufficient warrior and understands that one must be feared in this lifetime to stay alive. But once she finds herself attracted to the human Lothar's bravery and charms, she vows to fight by his side.



Gul'dan

A cunning, ruthless and all-powerful villain who sees power as absolute and irrefutable, Gul'dan fights for world domination on Azeroth, no matter what the cost. Rising to unite the orc tribes into a destructive invasion force, he will suck the life from any being in order to supercharge his army. Driven by the urge to conquer, for Gul'dan, all life is simply fuel for the Horde.



Khadgar

The bookworm and adolescent hero Khadgar's power lies in his knowledge. Although he wears the fated mark of the Kirin Tor, Khadgar, a former Guardian-in-training, fights to live a normal life. However, despite turning his back on the destiny prescribed to him, Khadgar will ultimately be drawn into the mystery around the invasion of Azeroth and learns to live up to the adult responsibilities that come with his power. As he fights to find his place among a band of heroes, Khadgar learns the secrets of his own power… and the dark forces that lie just underneath.



Blackhand

If orcs are bred for war, then Blackhand the Destroyer is war incarnate. Clothed in brutal armor chained together with the skeletal remains of his kills, he embodies everything orcs respect: strength, fearlessness and honour. A ferocious fighter whose booming voice alone can strike terror into his opponents, he is the living weapon Gul'dan will need to lead the assault on humanity.



Medivh

A Guardian who serves Azeroth as the ultimate magical weapon, Medivh has paid a high price for channelling such mystic power. The most powerful mage of all, he is the unequivocal Guardian of this land and is uniquely tasked with the ability to use magic to protect its citizens and restore balance to the natural order in the realms. When not called upon to defend the world, his life is an elusive one – where he contends with forces beyond our comprehension from a high tower built upon a nexus of powerful leylines. He exists to protect Azeroth; it is his sole purpose.



King Llane Wrynn

Every king inherits the challenges of the age – for the noble King Llane, that inheritance may be the greatest war in Azeroth's long, storied history. A benevolent ruler, Llane must rally the other leaders of Azeroth (dwarves, elves and his fellow humans) to fight the orc army descending upon their world…before annihilation is inevitable. Fighting to unite the realms, Llane is certain that if the people of Azeroth do not join one another against this enemy, they will perish. He will battle to the ends of their earth to keep his kingdom safe and protect his people.



Lady Taria

Taria is a wise and just queen, and in an age of beasts, brutes and battlegrounds, her grace and diplomacy provides a beacon of hope to the people in their hour of need. A skilled peacemaker who uses her feminine intuition to earn the trust of Garona, Taria knows that the people of Azeroth must unite if they are to end this conflict. She knows that "strong chiefs must earn their clan's trust," and she is certain they must earn that from Garona. Happily married to Llane Wrynn, her king, Taria is mother to their son, Varian. Their marriage is one of two equals, and they have true respect for each other.



Orgrim

Orgrim wields the mighty Doomhammer, one of the deadliest weapons in all of orc-kind. Handed down to him through the generations, his ancestor's bloodline of great warriors is a lineage that fuels his rage and prowess on the battlefield. War is his legacy. Forging an allegiance to Durotan through many battles and hunting beside him on the Frostwind dunes, he remains fiercely loyal to his Chieftain and his people and is one of the driving forces within the Frostwolf tribe. But as they march into Azeroth, the old world is left far behind.



Draka

Brave companion to Durotan and mother of their only infant son, Draka would fight to protect her family and her people until her dying breath. Fighting alongside her mate and Chieftain, she and Durotan have forged a love that has survived a dying planet and carried them to a new world. Standing by Durotan whatever happens, she carries their child into an uncertain future.



Anduin Lothar

Lothar is a fearless warrior loyally fighting for his king to stop a world-ending war against an impossible enemy…in order to keep his people safe and to protect his only son. Having sacrificed everything to become the protector Azeroth needs him to be, he is driven by loyalty to his country, often at the expense of his personal relationships. Although reluctant to let anyone in, Lothar stands for those who have pledged their lives to his king and kingdom. A slightly unhinged maverick with effortless swagger, the human hero is as talented riding a horse as a gryphon…and impossibly brave in battle. He WILL determine the fate of Azeroth.



Durotan

A beloved leader astride his Wolf mount, Durotan is fighting for a place to call home, one where he can forge a future for his family. Durotan battles for the survival of his clan and his expectant wife, Draka. He believes in his kind and in what they once were before Gul'dan came to power: creatures of brute strength driven by a natural order, whose discipline and honour to their kind was unquestionable. He knows that if his people are to survive, he and Draka must lead the charge for the orcs to make a home on Azeroth.

Warcraft: The Beginning opens on 9 June 2016.

The actors behind the prosthetics





GAME ON!

Here's our pick of the top 10 movies that are based on video games

Words: Balvinder Sandhu

Nobody will deny the fact that video games draw big audiences.

However, movies based on video games don't always do so well. We've come up with 10 such movies that you should watch, whether for its content, cast or sheer incredulity.

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider *(2001)*

Sexy video game character Lara Croft came to life as Angelina Jolie and geeks all around the world rejoiced. Lara is an archeologist (hence 'tomb raider') who has to seek out some mysterious devices before a cult of bad guys get their hands on them. There was also a sequel, *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle Of Life*, which starred Jolie and Gerard Butler, where the heroine went on a quest to save the mythical Pandora's Box. The character is set to be reprised soon, with Alicia Vikander cast recently, for the upcoming reboot, *Tomb Raider*.





Hitman *(2007)*

Set in a separate continuity from the games series, *Hitman* starred Timothy Olyphant, Dougray Scott and Olga Kurylenko. The 'hitmen' here constitute of orphans who are recruited and trained by 'the Organization' at an early age. Agent 47 then gets involved in a political conspiracy, which is when it starts to get really exciting. Who could forget the sequel, *Hitman: Agent 47*, which was partly shot here in good ole Singapore.

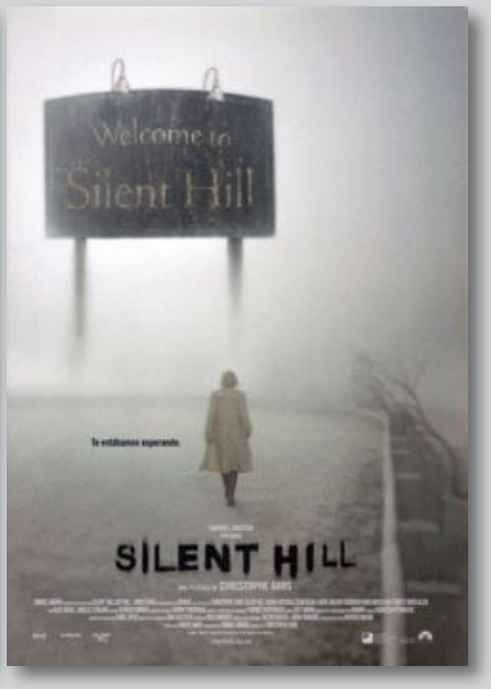




Silent Hill *(2006)*

This survival horror video game made it to the big screen 10 years ago, to give us a big scare. Radha Mitchell and Sean Bean starred in it and it's about a woman who takes her daughter to a town called Silent Hill, the name that the little girl calls out whenever she has nightmares. But she loses her daughter when she gets there and, while searching for her, she comes across a local cult and also finds out what exactly is her daughter's connection to this town.





Resident Evil *(2002)*

There are a total of seven movies in this franchise – the last one, *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter*, comes out early next year – but we're confident to say that the first one was the best. Staff at a secret laboratory have turned into zombies after an accident and the animals that they had been studying have been turned into mutants. An elite military unit is sent in, where they meet Alice (Milla Jovovich), who is suffering from amnesia.





Street Fighter *(1994)*

Aah...the '90s...when Jean-Claude Van Damme was actually a bankable star. Here, he leads an army of soldiers against a dictator, played by Raul Julia, who died from stomach cancer two months before the movie was released. Despite it being panned by fans of the game, it did fairly well at the box office. Oh, Aussie songstress Kylie Minogue is also in this movie.





Mortal Kombat *(1995)*

Christopher Lambert stars as one of three martial arts experts who take part in a very important tournament. They are summoned to a mysterious island where this ancient tournament is meant to take place and each has to work hard to battle in this tournament as its outcome will decide the fate as the world. Very serious stuff indeed. And with a heck of a lot of fighting thrown in too.





Max Payne *(2008)*

It might not be one of Mark Wahlberg's best movies but it was yet another chance for him to show just what a badass he really is. It's loosely based on the video game series and co-stars Mila Kunis. Wahlberg is Max Payne, a NYC detective whose family has been killed so he decides to take revenge. He teams up with Mona Sax (Kunis), who lost a loved one too – her sister – so, together, they set out to seek justice, while being chased by all kinds of baddies, including the police and the mafia.





Tron *(1982)*

Loved by many critics and considered as somewhat of a cult classic, this is one based-on-video-games-movie that still stands the test of time. Jeff Bridges is a computer programmer who ends up in the software world of a mainframe cyberspace (the Grid) and he has to interact with other computer programs in order to get out. Of course, there was also *Tron: Legacy* in 2010 but nothing beats the original.





Wreck-It Ralph *(2012)*

It might be an animated film but it's certainly very appealing to an adult audience, especially those who grew up playing video games. Ralph is sick of being the villain of his video game and he smells a good opportunity to turn into a much-loved hero when a new game arrives in the arcade he lives in. So he sneaks into the game, with the aim of winning a medal, but of course, he accidentally ends up ruining everything – he *is* Wreck-It Ralph after all – and ultimately unleashes an enemy that could ruin the entire arcade.





Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time *(2010)*

One especially for fantasy fans, this is set in the mystical land of Persia. A prince (Jake Gyllenhaal) and his princess (Gemma Arterton) are in a race against a dastardly villain (Ben Kingsley) who wants to destroy the world with a special dagger that causes time to be reversed. It will also then give him the power to rule the world, so he must be stopped at all costs.







AWAKEN THE SPIRITS!

The stars of The Conjuring 2 spill all
on working on the James Wan-directed horror movie



In The Conjuring 2, Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga reprise their roles as Ed and Lorraine Warren, two paranormal investigators who worked with a different family this time round, in order to help them rid of a very dark presence.



The action takes place in England this time, in a part of north London, where a single mother need help getting rid of the spirits that plague her and her four children. Helmed by James Wan (*Saw*, *Insidious*) once again, the movie is set to send chills down audiences' spines in the best way possible.

Here, Wilson and Farmiga share their thoughts on supernatural occurrences, returning to familiar faces and what it's like having a shorthand with their director.

This is your fourth movie with director James Wan. What's it like coming back and working with him again?

PATRICK WILSON: We have a shorthand. I'll do anything with him. He has such a passion for filmmaking. It's also nice to have the studio give him time and necessary resources to fulfill his vision for the film. His passion and his vision never waver. He's very intuitive with character and people's character – the people he gravitates to and works with repeatedly, and they go back to him. There's a comfort level. James knows I demand the most of myself – that I'm not going to just walk through a scene; I'm going to push myself. I think that gives him energy as well. And I know that he's not just going to walk through it; he's definitely trying to push himself. I think that's one of the reasons I love working with him.

We also have a really good time working together. There is something to be said, at the end of the day, as to whether you enjoy the people that you're working with – and I genuinely enjoy working with James. We have a great time. We know when to dig in and go to work and we know when to just have a laugh. I think that's vital.

All of the films you've done with him so far have been supernatural thrillers. Are there other genres you want to explore together?

PATRICK WILSON: Absolutely. We've been talking about that for years. After the first *Insidious,* we said we've got to do something else together – we weren't thinking there would be three other horror movies! [*laughs*] But, no, we've always talked about that. Even when he was doing *Furious 7*, he was like, 'I wish there was something in this for you.'

And he has been and will continue to be successful in different genres. That's important. I think making a really good, scary movie is difficult, but I think that the way he sets up his scares is similar to the way you do stunts in an action movie, and I think that made it an easy transition for him into *Furious 7*. I'm sure *Aquaman* will be even more thrilling now that he's on board.

You and Vera Farmiga have such a great on-screen chemistry and built a powerful bond in the first film as Ed and Lorraine Warren. What was it like reuniting in these roles for this film?

PATRICK WILSON: Yeah, well, I rarely say I have favorites because I've worked with some amazing leading ladies, but, next to my wife, she's certainly my favorite lady to work with. It also helped with Vera that I knew her socially and as my wife's director and co-star in *Higher Ground*. So I knew her on set, through my wife, and around the business before we worked together. I think that really helped.

We both generally love playing these guys. But we also wanted to push these characters. We went and met with Lorraine [Warren] like we did on the first one, before shooting. And that always helps to ground it. You know, we're at different places in our lives now, and it's always strange to come back to something so comforting … but I watched the first movie again and tried to get back inside Ed. It's a different kind of preparation the second time. I'm trying to push it forward, but remember all the homework I did four years ago.

Had you ever heard of the Enfield case before you got involved in this *Conjuring*?

PATRICK WILSON: I had seen a couple of the pictures of the girls in mid-air and [British paranormal investigator] Maurice Grosse, but probably only as a result of the first movie, to be honest. But I hadn't specifically heard of the Enfield case.

This new story takes place a few years after the events of the first. Did that help you with your preparation – to know that both you and your character are at different places in your lives than before?

PATRICK WILSON: Yes. We had the built-in camaraderie between Vera and me, so we didn't need to establish what their relationship was; it was more, 'Where are they now.' We could just cut to the meat of it. I think that's what the story does – not that you need to see the first one, but I think it helps to lay the groundwork for Ed and Lorraine.

So you went to see Lorraine before shooting and she also visited the set of this production. Was that the first time you'd seen her since the first *Conjuring*?

PATRICK WILSON: Yes, and that helps ground it. It would be easy to become overwhelmed with the genre or the occult, or the expectations of how the movie should do or how your performance should be … and then you go to this sweet little house in rural Connecticut where Ed and Lorraine lived for many years – where she still lives – and it keeps it very real. You understand where they came from. That makes it very authentic, especially for Vera because she's playing her. And it gives me an opportunity to learn as much as I can about Ed as well as Lorraine's memories of Enfield.

Lorraine also had her daughter and son-in-law



there, Judy and Tony Spera, and they're very helpful. Tony was a dear friend of Ed's and he was constantly feeding me info about how Ed did things. They would give me little tidbits of how he would handle certain situations. That was extremely helpful.

It's just nice to go up there and connect, and find little things we can use. I remember the first time we went up for the first *Conjuring*, there was a chicken running around in the house. We came back and told James, you gotta have a chicken in the movie [*laughs*] and we got a chicken in the movie! So this time, we were trying to find little things like that.

Did you?

PATRICK WILSON: I did, yeah. When we were at the local pub, they were asking us what we wanted to drink, and I remembered Lorraine and Tony telling me a story about Ed. He knew that lemons were free and water was free, and he was the kind of guy who would go into a place and instead of ordering a glass of lemonade, he would order water and a bunch of lemons and put a little sugar in there and make his own lemonade right at the table. So I thought that was fantastic. And if you look around in the pub scene, everybody's got a drink and I've got a glass full of lemons and a bunch of packets of sugar. Just my little nod to Ed.

Have you been inside the Warrens' Occult Museum?

PATRICK WILSON: Several times. My goal this time was to get Vera in there. On the drive up, I said, 'You are going in that damn room.' [*laughs*] And she did and, of course, she was fine.

In the first movie, a lot of the physical action was centered on Lorraine, and in this *Conjuring*, a lot of that action now falls to your character. How did you prepare for that? Did you do a lot of your own stunts?

PATRICK WILSON: Yeah. I've always loved stunts. And that was one of the things I loved about this film. The first *Conjuring* ends with this exorcism and everything that goes down with it … Well, what happens if you try to do that and it doesn't work? Or there is no response or the force is too overwhelming? I thought it was cool that James wanted to try that with this film, and I think the physicality was just part of James wanting to push the envelope – what happens if Ed's in that situation, what's he going to do? He's a very practical, hands-on guy. So it would make sense that if push comes to shove, he's in it to win it. If it's fight or flight, he's definitely a fighter.

That goes along with what I've heard about him anyway. There's a scene in the movie where he confronts a doubter on a television show. That was taken from a real episode of *Sally Jessy Raphael* in the '80s. Ed's not going to sit down quietly while someone's doubting him or, more importantly, his wife. He's going to come out throwin' and I love that about him. Because Lorraine is so sweet and clairvoyant and quiet, it's nice that he's just so sort of meat-and-potatoes, 'If you say something to me, I'm gonna punch you in the face if I don't like it.' I kind of like that; he's very direct.

Janet and Margaret Hodgson, the real sisters who as children experienced the events that inspired the film, visited the sets in Los Angeles and London. Did you have the opportunity to talk with them at all, and did that affect your performance in any way?

PATRICK WILSON: Yeah, I talked to them for a while. They were not at all star-struck to be on a movie set. Not at all. It was very painful for them. And, more importantly, when they met Lorraine [Warren] again for the first time since the time period of the movie, there was a hug and an understanding that they knew this woman tried to help them. There was a definite connection. That, to me, is enough validity for what we do.

You know, it's very easy to judge the unknown, and even if you and I tell a story of this interview later, we would tell different things. Some maybe thought their experience was trivial or made up, but, of course, many believe them. And like anything paranormal, you probably question yourself: Are you seeing things? Is there some kind of mental illness or disturbance or is it real? That's all obvious. But what I found with Janet and Margaret was – whatever your thoughts on anything paranormal or the occult are – when you talk to these women you realise that this experience was extremely personal for them and took a real toll, and is, I think, still very hard for them to deal with.

You know, we're talking about demonology here, but let's go to the flip-side. When some people go to church they feel they're being endowed by the Holy Spirit and they feel God. Well, is God someone who talks to you or is God in your heart? This is just the other side of that coin, right? It's very real for some people, and you can't take that away. It's still not tangible; you can't touch it, just like religion. It's not any different to me. I think you have to honour it with the same amount of respect because whether it was real and there was a possession or whether someone's going through something very traumatic, you can't trivialise it – mental



breakdown or nervous breakdown, whatever it is. It's still real. It still affects them in a profound way, and that's what I saw with them.

Can you talk about working with Frances O'Connor, who plays Peggy Hodgson, the single mom whose home and children come under paranormal assault in the film?

PATRICK WILSON: Unbelievable. Frances is just wonderful. She has the right amount of strength and frailty. As soon as you walk into that house and lock eyes with her you feel her; you feel she's this mother who's just trying to make ends meet, but who's in desperate need and will do anything for her kids. She just killed in the role. Frances and also Madison Wolfe, the young actress who plays Janet Hodgson, were fantastic. I'd worked with Madison before. We did a movie shot in Louisiana a few years ago. Her ability and her accent are great … she's no joke. She'll be a big star.

Can you talk about working with the international ensemble of actors James brought together for this film – Simon McBurney, Franka Potente, Maria Doyle Kennedy, Simon Delaney …

PATRICK WILSON: The cast is unbelievable. Eclectic, dynamic, different. And you have to thank not just James, but the studio, the producers, and also the casting department. They just cast it so well. And that's the beauty of this movie; it's a real, proper studio film. It's difficult to pull in so many great British, Irish, Welsh actors – people who are in high demand and have careers all over the world. Simon Delaney hosts a morning show in Ireland as well as being an actor, for example. Simon McBurney, who directed me in *All My Sons* on Broadway, has not only a busy acting career but is a world renowned theater director.

This is a movie about England's most documented case; and you need to treat it with – I keep thinking of this word 'respect.' You need to find the right actors for the job. When you think of the great horror movies, you see the impact of a great cast. In *The Shining,* you have Jack Nicholson and Shelley Duvall. It's dedication to the genre and to the script. You've got to take it seriously. And James just knows…

What do you hope audiences will walk away with when they experience *The Conjuring 2* in the theater?

PATRICK WILSON: I want them to be scared; that's sort of the point here. But more than that – even more than the first one – this movie has tremendous heart. You will have people not only frightened, you will have people smiling, you will have people laughing, you may have the odd person cry. There's a great romantic story in here as well. That's what sets the movie apart. You will care about these people, watching this family go through this. And, at the same time, you will be genuinely freaked out. [*laughs*]

# # #

What do you like about working with James Wan as a director, and why do you think his movies have such a profound effect on audiences?

VERA FARMIGA: James is a wizardry combo of technical savvy, emotional profundity and terrifying imagination. It's the frappé of all three that makes him such a hotshot storyteller. It's his easy-breezy humorous bedside manner and his big heart that make him so appealing to me as an actor. We have a wonderful shorthand this time around. He knows to direct me like a dancer, often with choreography and physicality and tempo.

For me personally, a large part of creating the scares is oftentimes approaching it as a dance, considering every little movement, every head turn, every step, every breath. James will tell me to linger two more seconds here, or slow my pace there. I find wonderment in working with him – in the emotional and physical choreography of it all, 'Whirl there, pirouette there, leap there, flicker here…'

What qualities of the real Lorraine Warren were most important to you in shaping your performance in *The Conjuring 2*?

VERA FARMIGA: Lorraine is as sweet as molasses; her nature is kind and compassionate and gentle. I focus on her gracefulness, her poise. She is light-footed; she floats chipper and bright-eyed and passionately through life. At the same time, she stomps with sure-footedness and squashes and rebukes evil with assuredness and conviction. She has a remarkably cheerful disposition, for all the macabre and devilry she has witnessed.

There are joyful people, and then there's Lorraine Warren. Anyone who meets her can agree that she is luminous. She glows holy with positivity and compassion. She adored her husband so and respected him, honored him, admired him. She delighted in him and their ordained mission together. Tapping into Lorraine's sustained joy was imperative.

You and Patrick Wilson have such great chemistry on screen. What was it like to reunite with him in the roles of Ed and Lorraine and further build on the bond you created so authentically in the first film?

VERA FARMIGA: Patrick and I also have great chemistry off-screen. What is chemistry but rapport – it's friendship; it's attraction. I'm attracted to his goodness, his goofiness, his willingness. He is a radiant spark of a human being and, frankly, he lights me up like few can; he makes me shriek with laughter. Reuniting with him this time around for *The Conjuring 2* was even more jocularity and mirth. We ease into buffoonery and antics as soon as you throw us together. Reprimanding us won't help. It's like adding baking soda and vinegar together – it just gets frothy and fun. We'll get the job more than done, but not without a thousand wisecracks. I love to pull that guy's chain, and he loves to pull even harder on mine.

Had you heard about the Enfield Haunting prior to *The Conjuring 2*, and what really sticks with you about the real life events that inspired the film?

VERA FARMIGA: What really provokes me about the real life events that occurred in the Enfield Haunting was the duration of time that the infestation/possession endured. The Hodgson family was tormented for years and years; they suffered through, coped with, and weathered years and years of spiritual, mental, physical, emotional anguish. How anyone puts on a brave face and perseveres through such harrowing, searing, relentless distress and trauma is beyond my comprehension. And how anyone agrees to revisit that gloom and fear in the form of a film is sheer audacity to me.

You have an incredibly diverse career, and continue to explore complex women who go to some very dark places. What draws you to characters like Lorraine Warren or Norma

Bates and the worlds they inhabit? Are you a fan of scary movies yourself?

VERA FARMIGA: Funnily enough, what turns my head about a female character is her lightness. She needs to have a considerable amount of glow. It can be anything positive – humor, goodness, perseverance, compassion, dignity... No matter how dark the world she inhabits, no matter what depravity of obstacle is thrown her way, it's imperative that she must have some luminescence of character. Endurance and dedication and goodness are vital to me when considering a character. She could be flawed as they come, but imperative is finding a core of virtue.

You bonded with Lorraine on the first film. What was it like to see her again when she visited *The Conjuring 2* set? Had you had a chance to see each other or interact since the first film?

VERA FARMIGA: Seeing Lorraine when she visited *The Conjuring 2* set was strengthening, steadying, and assuring for me. I love listening to her positivity, and watching her. I love to make her laugh.

Patrick and I were eager to visit her at her Connecticut home a few months before the start of photography on *The Conjuring 2*. Time spent with her and her daughter, Judy, and her son-in-law, Tony Spera, is like time spent with extended family. We ate homemade meatballs and told jokes, caught up. I even mustered the courage to visit their archival Museum of the Occult in the basement. Patrick insisted. This time a swig of wine girded me with enough courage to explore the Demonology Museum.

In *The Conjuring 2*, Lorraine resists taking on another case, but the Hodgson family moves her to want to help. What qualities do you think Frances O'Connor brings to the role of Peggy Hodgson, the single mom trying to protect her children through all this?

VERA FARMIGA: Second time around, I can verify that Frances O'Conner is a formidable actress. I had the great privilege of working with her on the HBO film *Iron Jawed Angels*. She is as tough and deep and nuanced and easygoing and big-hearted as they come. As serious as the subject matter, she fit in effortlessly and harmoniously to the frivolity and gaiety that Patrick and I establish. Frances delved deeply and acutely into such frazzled, worn out, protective, devoted, single-handed maternity – she blows me away.

What was it like for you to work with Madison Wolfe, who plays Janet? This is a pretty intense role for her …

VERA FARMIGA: *The Conjuring 2* is a declaration of the tornado of talent, ability, and craft that is Madison Wolfe. Madison is a revelation as Janet. She has a savoir faire of storytelling that is beyond her years and experience. Her inventiveness, her finesse, her ease, her imagination, and her access to emotional depth are unlike anything I've seen at such a young age. It's mind-blowing.



There were reports from the first film of strange occurrences on and off the set – and some crew members reported paranormal encounters during this shoot as well … did you experience anything supernatural while working on *The Conjuring 2*?

VERA FARMIGA: I don't like referencing these occurrences. intuit that it empowers negative mysticism when I acknowledge them. Sure. Eerie, mysterious things happen in and around the time of the shoot. I have photographed weird and mystifying things time and time again in and around filming. It is very, very baffling and inexplicable and odd. I send pictures of the strangeness to Patrick and James. Ask them.

What do you hope audiences experience when they see *The Conjuring 2*

VERA FARMIGA: Audiences see this type of film to be transported to another realm, for the spiritual consideration of it. For some it's to be reminded and fortified that, 'Oh, as challenging as life is for me, these people have it much harder, much worse.' These types of films investigate and challenge our belief systems. I can only hope that *The Conjuring 2* is an enlightening, emotional, dramatic, transporting experience for audiences. I hope they can experience, in a palpable way, the terror, the panic, the alarm, the fear and trembling that the Hodgson family experienced, and decide for themselves the validity, the possibility of negative and positive mysticism.

Do you think you'll revisit the character of Lorraine again for another *Conjuring* story?

VERA FARMIGA: Yes! I hope to revisit this character for *at least* a trilogy of stories. I'd love to bookend *The Conjuring 2* with a *3*. I love that at the heart of our story is a tale of compassion and selflessness and righteousness. It feels a holy endeavour to revisit these characters time and again. And to accomplish it with good friends – James, Patrick, producers Rob Cowan and Peter Safran.





RETURN TO INDEPENDENCE

Director Roland Emmerich and lead actor Jeff Goldblum take us through the ups and downs of *Independence Day: Resurgence*

When *Independence Day* came out in cinemas 20 years ago, it made a mark on moviegoers and still remains as one of the best alien/ disaster movies.



Director Roland Emmerich returns to helm the much-anticipated sequel, with a new threat unleashed on mankind. The movie stars Jeff Goldblum, Judd Hirsch, Bill Pullman, Liam Hemsworth and Brent Spiner.

Emmerich and Goldblum share their thoughts on returning to the much-loved characters, working with each other and how they feel about introducing it to a whole new generation.



When did you first consider the idea of this sequel?

Roland Emmerich: I think it was during the making of *2012*. That was the first movie I shot using digital cameras, the first one I totally relied only on CG computer graphics for the effects and I realised, all of a sudden, how far technology had advanced. I talked a lot with my visual effects supervisor about it, and said, "at the time we couldn't do so many things, but now we can do them..." and it was the first time I had any idea.
To be honest, I'm not a guy who really likes sequels, because I think, "why do you want to see something again that you have seen before?" and it's why I also decided to not make this a straight sequel, but the continuation of a story, and that's when the whole idea came about to say, "what would the world look like when we know the aliens are coming back?" With all the positive and negative of that, and that's what got me going.

A lot of today's big blockbusters tend to take themselves seriously, but with Independence Day you managed to find funny, quirky moments. Is that going to continue into this film?

RE: It is. It's not in the forefront like in the first film, but it has the same kind of lightness, I think. But when you look at the first one, I was actually surprised at how, for some stretches, it's bad news, bad news, bad news and nobody makes any jokes about that. So we tried to emulate that. There is a little bit more joking at the beginning, but then at one point it gets really serious because it's about the threat and a lot of people die. It's a fine balance you have to have.

What was the process of getting to this point?

RE: I had an idea to focus on a whole new generation. And it opens up the movie in a way, for franchise possibilities, which naturally Fox as a studio was very interested in, so you have new fresh faces. It also somewhat related to Jeff, Bill and me, because we became, all of a sudden, the old guys! We were like the geezer squad, the old advisors and everyone was very kind to us. And then these young actors, they come into a movie like this really excited, so it was great. And then Judd Hirsch, who is 82, is fitter than all of us!

That was a great feeling on the set, and we have an even younger generation, a couple of kids in the movie. So it had a really nice feeling that this is a different world, it has different characters; we have African characters, Chinese characters, it's more of a worldwide idea. And that was very cool to do, as a filmmaker, to re-visit certain characters in the story but with all this new input.

It has been 20 years since *Independence Day*. Are you a different filmmaker from the man who made the original?

RE: Not that much! I'm like Germany's oldest teenager, the only one that has grey hair and looks like an old man, but I'm still the same. But you do have what they call the YIBS, which is the Years In The Business, and you maybe don't freak out as fast and you know what's coming.

But this time, you have a much bigger toy box to play with...

RE: From the very beginning, I made it very clear that you need a much bigger visual effects budget than the first one, because it was a different time then. In 1996 we had 400-450 visual effects shots and that was big. Now in the time of Marvel and all these other movies, you have to have 2,000 or so otherwise you can't compete.

Is there anything that you wanted to do in the original film that you can now do?

RE: Yes. In the original with the aliens, I was



very disappointed because we had to have little stick figures and puppets and it looked... When I saw it again, I said, "Oh my god..." And I always imagined the volumetric clouds around the ships for the first one were all done in a cloud tank, which looks real but didn't really look good enough. Today we can do so much better stuff. Some people are still very nostalgic about the whole model thing, but I'm not, really. I don't have to do that anymore and I'm relieved! Now I'm very relaxed, saying, "Okay, a little bit here, a little bit there... Let's do a new simulation..."

How was it rounding the old cast back up again?

RE: It was like a family or a class reunion! And nobody talks about it, but to get Brent Spiner back in the film as Dr. Okun... We started this already in the novelisations, there were two or three sequels to the original novelisation of the movie and at one point, Dean called me up and said, "I was just talking to this publisher, I think Brent Spiner should be alive! He should be in a coma." And I said, "Great!" And it was really cool because Brent is such an amazing actor and he adds so much quirkiness to the film. He wakes up after 20 years and everything is astounding! But he will make another friend in this film...

You and Dean helped to re-ignite and push forward the disaster spectacle genre. In some ways, are you competing with yourself here?

RE: Yeah, but I'm always saying, it's a little bit like asking Woody Allen or Alfred Hitchcock why they were doing their movies. You find your own genre in a way. I'm not a particular fan of superhero movies or comic book films, because I grew up in Germany and didn't have that stuff. So in a weird way I had to invent my own genre, which is science fiction blended with disaster, and I always try to combine it a little bit.

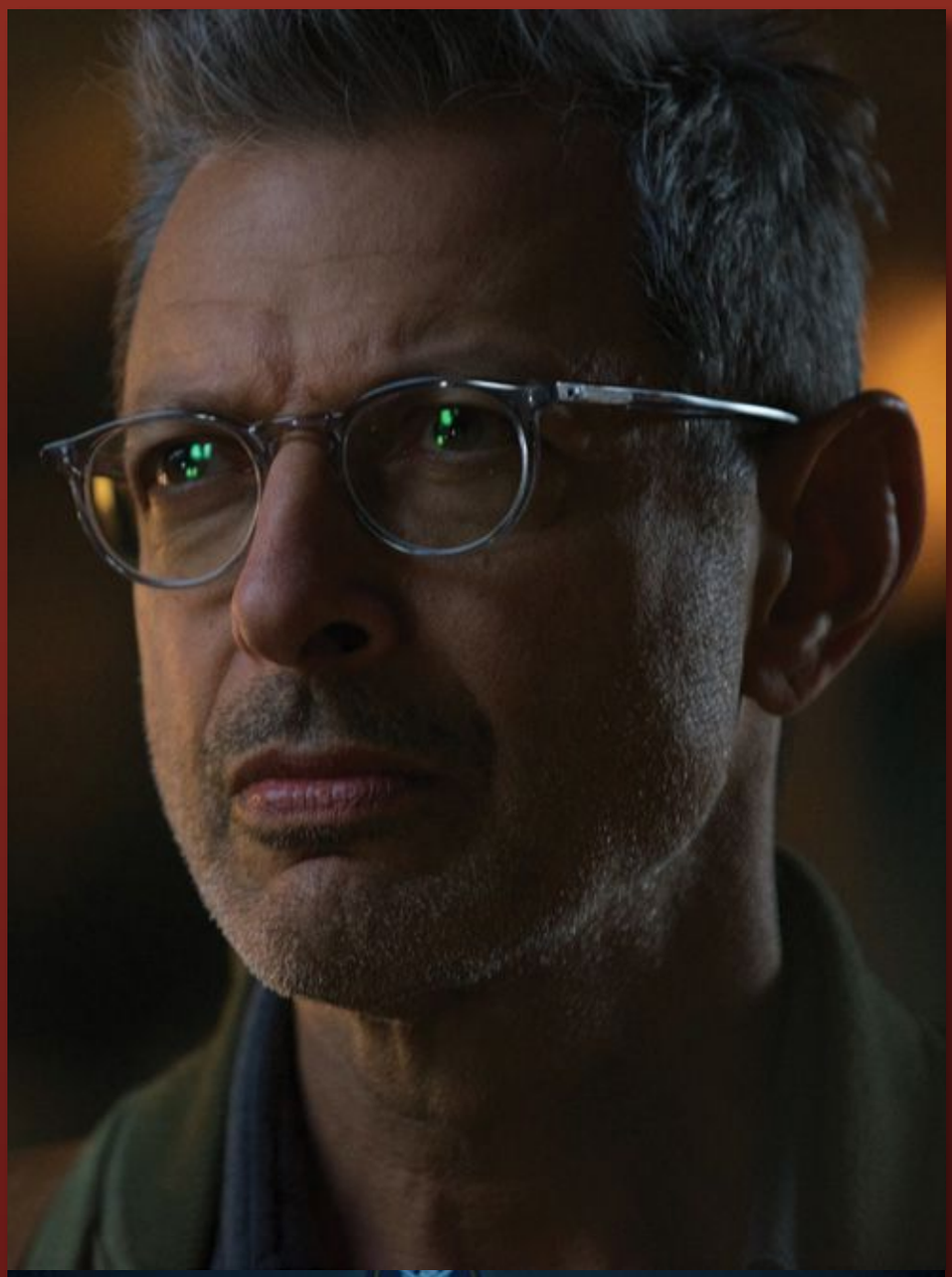
In every one of these movies, you can have a different aspect, such as with *The Day After Tomorrow*, where it was climate change and how it could affect our lives. And in *2012* is pretty much a re-telling of Noah's Ark in a modern way, and there's probably 10 or 20 other movies that I could make which just reflect one aspect and the genre is disaster movie, but it's also more than that. So in a way I'm quite happy to do these things because it's my genre, it's what I'm interested in.

So what does *Independence Day: Resurgence* have to tell us?

RE: There's the message of unity for a very divided world that might not have major conflicts but a lot of smaller ones, it's amazing actually how fractured our world really still is. And then shows what we could accomplish if we work together. Then there's the whole fact that when you're the older generation and you tell the younger generation that if you work really hard and train well, we can beat them back. And then they come and you have nearly no chance. And you have a certain responsibility, and there's a dialogue between Jeff Goldblum and Bill Pullman where they talk about that. They say, "we cannot give up, because if we give up, what will the younger generation think about us?" It's a little bit born out of the idea that I turned 60, so I'm now the older generation. And Jeff too. We don't feel old in ourselves, but we are! That means you think about where you're going, and the movie reflects that a lot.

And then aliens themselves feel like a warning to us about not being greedy and wanting to destroy everything to get resources...

RE: Yes, but it's a little bit more that we invented an alien that is like a form of locust or cancer. They come in and destroy. But then we learn in this film that there's more than that. There's a whole other universe out there which is at war with them...





Do we assume there might be other things out there?

RE: It's a big universe! There might just be more!

Are there ideas, then, from the original plan to make two follow-up movies, that can be put into this one but also spread to other movies?

RE: There can! We made a huge step after the first film with alien technology. We can't build it, but we can harvest it and we have anti-gravity devices, we have fusion drive, we have all these elements. And in this movie, we add even more knowledge.

What do you have against London? What has that city done to you that you must keep taking it down?

RE: Nothing! [*laughs*] It's a little bit of my sarcastic sense of humour. The aliens' new ship is so big that it has its own gravity, so when it lands, it sucks up Asia and dumps it on Europe!

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It has been 20 years since the first film. You're friendly with Roland, so did you keep tabs on any sequel or have they checked in with you about the status of a new film?

Jeff Goldblum: He and Dean Devlin are wonderful guys and I've stayed friends with them. And then a few years ago, maybe three years ago, they called me and said, "Hey, let's have dinner, because we want to tell you what we're cooking up and we think it might be interesting." So we had dinner and they described the movie and that was it! I was very excited.

Did you ever think you'd end up making another Independence Day?

JG: Not really. I wasn't really thinking about it. I'd always wanted to work with Roland and Dean again, because I had such a good time making the first one. Judd Hirsch was so wonderful to work with, and Bill Pullman... everybody. But no, I didn't consider it that much until they called, and then I think there were some twists and turns. By that time I was hoping that it would come to be because of what they described – and thank heavens here we are.

Roland and Dean created David Levinson, but you always have an input into your characters. Did they give you some input into him?

JG: They did! Roland, as much as he's a wonderful movie maker, is also a great teacher. I was thrilled to learn a lot about not only this character and what Roland wanted, and how he saw it, but acting and filmmaking in general. But Roland was very fun and playful and although terrifically prepared, he was infectiously spontaneous. He was generous and welcoming of everyone's input. And I had a lovely, intense and thorough bunch of sessions with the writers, Nick Wright and James A. Woods, who are also both in the movie. They had been a team through the last stages of

development and were on the set every day and were not only very much fun guys, but they were a fountain of delicious collaboration for me. We went through every line and every page of the script and they helped me understand what was going on and develop it further.

David has changed over the years. Is he still a slightly reluctant hero, even though he's the head of the Earth Space Defense team?

JG: He's nothing if not conscientious and has taken seriously and been immersed in his challenging job. Some of it is gratifying, that everyone's working together, that the human family is finally on the same page, roughly. The advances, technologically, from the borrowed alien equipment are probably interesting to him in solving especially the environmental planetary challenges and rebuilding, which we've done very effectively. Even though, in this 20 years, we're still processing the loss of three billion people, and everybody has lost people close to them.

But there may have been some reluctance, and I don't think it's my character's sweet spot to direct an arms buildup. Yet that he's had to do, and he takes protecting our precious planet and its people seriously. I suppose he's had to grapple with violence, or the threat of violence, and he has had to deal with the fact that it can be ethically and morally necessary in some situations. And of course assessing the very life-changing information from 1996 that we're not alone, and the many questions that come out of that are fascinating. Some of those questions get investigated in this film.

Was the experience of making this film different from working on the original in 1996?

JG: As far as I remember, it's not very dissimilar. Roland is uniquely talented and has a singular personality and way of making movies, and it felt familiar. He's grown, as we know and the technology has grown and the whole size of this movie was bigger. There were whole sets that were huge and impressive and glorious and beautiful and then the CGI stuff that they intended was previewed in drawings and pre-visualised sequences, and that was a little different. But it was basically getting together with Judd Hirsch and Bill Pullman and new arrivals like Charlotte Gainsbourg and Liam Hemsworth and with Roland's direction, it felt like it was the same and fun.

Talking of the new faces, how was it working on the film with people who were essentially fans of the first film?

JG: More and more, I run into people, whether on the set or just on the street who say, "gee, you were part of my early life," or "my mom's life..." So I'm not unused to that. But on this, Liam, with whom I had a bunch of stuff to do, couldn't have been more delightful. I'm not sure what he knows of my work! [*laughs*] We didn't really talk about that, there was plenty of fun to be had just where we were, and I'd seen all the *Hunger Games* movies, I was interested in his work and was happy to learn from him. He's an instinctual and very admirable artist.



You're back with Judd Hirsch again, playing David's father Julius. Do you have a father/son relationship on set?

JG: Yes! We do! He's such a great actor, I've always admired him, back for instance to *Ordinary People*. So he's a family member in the craft business, I'm a bit of a craft geek, I'm interested in how other people do it, and someone as masterful as he is, I was thrilled to spend time with him and play with him and ask all my questions. And then he's such a terrific actor that it's easy to feel that we're actually father and son when we play, and we fell into that kind of relationship. But we had a lot of fun, a lot of laughs, laughed and cried, both.

Is there an idea that David and father have become strained over the years, given Julius' book about how he saved the world? Or are they still close?

JG: They are okay. We feel deeply about each other. But what with the world having changed and my job having changed, I'm not living near him anymore, I'm not in New York, I'm all over the world with responsibilities that are demanding. I think there's a reference in the movie and in our imaginations and back story over the ensuing years that it's been different, and that we haven't spent as much time with each other on a daily basis, but we both still care so much about each other. But what I think Julius likes to dine out on is the story from the first film where I got the idea when I was drunk and at my lowest point during those few days and I'm on the floor when he says, "get up, you'll catch a cold..." and I say, "wait a minute…!" And he knows he gave me the idea, and that it finally won the day so of course, if not for him, the war would've been lost!

You became a father for the first time last year. Does that change your outlook on the film and its themes of connection and humanity?

JG: As anticipated and warned, everything kind of changes a little bit. So far, in the most delightful way, it's comfortable and natural. And thinking about this movie, you think about the themes and whether people will have fun seeing it while eating their popcorn, but also whether there are some nourishing and wholesome nuggets that might positively impact them. And then I start to think about having the baby-proofer come over to the house and it's kind of like the job that David has had over the last 20 years: he's planet-proofing! Part of that job is to visualise and imagine all the potential disasters that could happen. And with Charlie, my son, you're saying, "he could crack his skull on this or he could strangle himself with that..." or as they tell you, you don't even think about things like him getting to the toilet and falling in, so you have to clamp it. Not to mention outlets! So David Levinson does the same thing on a much different, larger scale... How do we alien-proof this planet and see what we can do? And he has to imagine all sorts of disasters and prevent them.

And we are much like children compared to the aliens...

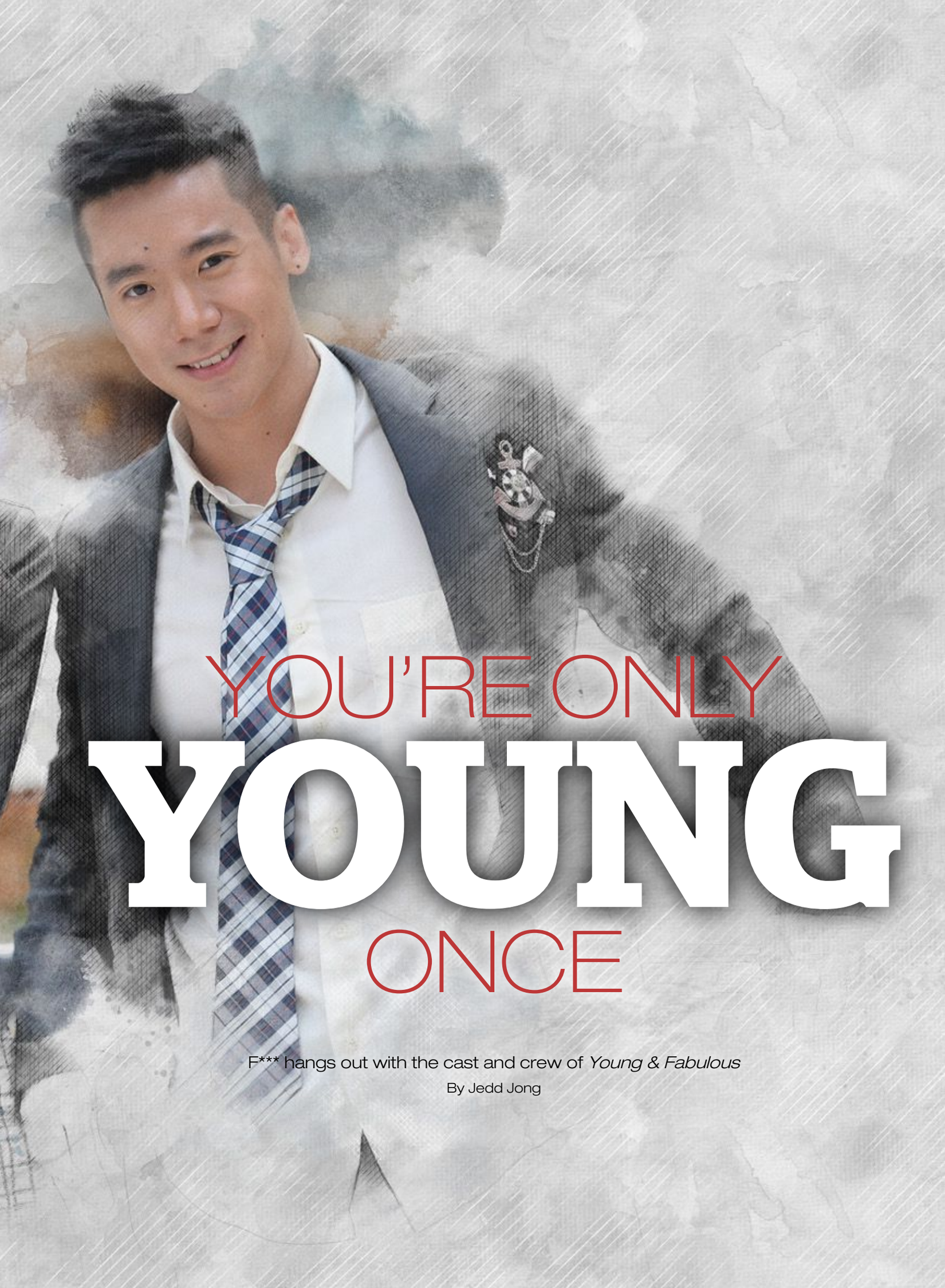
JG: Well, we can't travel like they do. Not to give anything away, but they travel using wormholes. And they know more about a few things. They're advanced militarily, but in some ways they seem to reflect our own small stupidities. A disregard for life in some vile ugly way, that we can learn from. And a disregard for the beauty that is a living planet, and a misguided need to exploit resources at the planet's expense. So we learn from them some of what we need to learn about ourselves. We've got environmental challenges that we've caused and our self-destructive capacities must be figured out, or it'll be curtains.

Is there anything else that the new film is illuminating?

JG: Yes, that we're all in the same boat, that the planet is fragile and that human beings are all part of a family and not to work in accordance with that is stupid and unnecessary.

Independence Day: Resurgence opens on 23 June 2016.





YOU'RE ONLY YOUNG ONCE

F*** hangs out with the cast and crew of *Young & Fabulous*

By Jedd Jong

On a Tuesday afternoon, ahead of the movie's premiere at VivoCity mall, F* was in attendance for the *Young & Fabulous* press conference at Raffles City Convention Centre.**



The comedy-drama is the first Singaporean film set in the world of cosplay, the hobby which involves dressing up and pretending to be characters from comics, movies, video games and other media.

The film's trio of main characters are Royston (Aloysius Pang), Violet (Joyce Chu) and Hao Ren (Joshua Tan), three friends brought together by their mutual passion for cosplay – none of them begins the movie as a cosplayer *per se*, but each gets pulled into that world. On their journey of discovery, they face much opposition, seeing as Singaporean society prizes academic excellence, with hobbies often seen as getting in the way. The main manifestation of this comes in the form of Royston's mother Mei Feng (Quan Yi Fong), who wants Royston to become a doctor. Royston, Violet and Hao Ren also butt heads with the unyielding discipline master at their school, Mr. Boo (Gurmit Singh).

Directors Michael Woo and Joyce Lee were present, as well as cast members Pang, Chu, Tan, Quan, Singh, Henry Thia, Jordan Ng and Jeffrey Xu and composer JerryC. Explaining the genesis of the film, co-director/producer Lee said that she interviewed groups of young people, asking what they would like to see a Singaporean film be about. "They said they don't watch local films and only watch Hollywood movies," she recounted. "I was a little disheartened by that sentiment, that local youths will not watch local films. So that led me to the idea of making a film especially for Singaporean youths, so that 10-20 years later, there will continue to be Singaporean films. I wanted to make a movie that would encourage young people to chase their dreams in spite of adversity."
Lee also reassured the local cosplay community that the film will not misrepresent their hobby.

"I wanted to change the general audience's attitude towards cosplayers, because they might be regarded as odd. After you watch the movie, you'll have a deeper understanding of the hobby," she promised. The screenplay was written by Rebecca Leow and Allan Ho.

Co-director Woo was happy to be working with many familiar faces again, saying, "Actors like Quan Yi Fong, Gurmit Singh and Henry Thia are our good friends and have collaborated with us many times. I've made many projects with Henry." He added that his daughter was excited to hear that Aloysius Pang would be in the film. "She exclaimed that he is very handsome. I think he's just okay-looking," Woo joked.

Band Of Brothers

The three leads Pang, Tan and Chu arrived to the press conference dressed in Japanese high school uniforms; their characters wear these costumes in the film.

Speaking about how he relates to the character of Royston, Pang shared that when he was in school, his mother would have very high expectations of his academic performance. "I have two older brothers, and there was the pressure to do better than them. I was a bad student and I let her down," Pang admitted. "I think all parents want the best for their children, and want them to be able to get and hold down a good job for their own well-being and so they can raise their own family," he continued. "There will always be obstacles when you're chasing your dream and there will be nay-sayers who will try to dissuade you from your chosen path. It's important to persevere. I have thought of quitting acting before, but I'm glad I pushed on, or I wouldn't be here today."

Pang had burst a blood vessel in his eye just before filming, and had a red eye in all of his scenes. Co-director Lee revealed that this had to be corrected frame-by-frame during post-production. "I felt very guilty, because I knew a lot of time and resources were spent on fixing that," Pang said somewhat bashfully.

Australian-born Tan received repeated ribbing from his directors and cast-mates for his somewhat lacklustre command of Mandarin. "This is the first time I'm in a Chinese-language movie, so I felt the pressure was on." He also commented on not having the safety net of director Jack Neo and his cast-mates from the three *Ah Boys to Men* films in which he starred. "My Chinese is very poor, so I got a lot of free tuition classes from the directors," he joked.

The film features a scene in which Tan goes shirtless and wears green body paint, cosplaying as a character akin to the Incredible Hulk. He was instructed to lose some of the muscle definition he had gained for *Ah Boys to Men 3: Frogmen*, since the directors felt it wasn't realistic for a student in secondary school. "While I was a little self-conscious, I felt that it was refreshing because I didn't feel like I was on display as much as with my previous shirtless scenes," Tan laughed. If that's what he looks like after *losing* muscle definition, there's no hope for the rest of us regular guys.

Keeping Things Fresh

Chu felt the pressure as well, seeing as this is the Malaysian songstress' first film role, and she's playing a lead character to boot. "I was really nervous and was afraid that I'd do a bad job, especially since many of the other actors are very experienced and are artistes whom I've grown up watching," Chu confessed. "On the set, everyone from the cast and crew took very good care of me." Both Pang and Tan are 26, while Chu is 19, and all three are playing classmates. "I only recently graduated from secondary school and I did encounter some

opposition from my parents in pursuing a singing career, so I could relate to this story," she said. Chu added that she found it easy to get into the scenes in which she was acting opposite Singh, noting that Singh would experiment with different line readings for different takes, which kept her on her toes.

"I've been doing that since my *Phua Chu Kang* days, as I realise that as an actor one of my jobs is to be fresh," Singh said of this practice. "This is what I've always told my children in real life: if you like something, if you're passionate about something, you should go for it," Singh said. His daughter Gabrielle studied film at School of the Arts (SOTA) Singapore. "A lot of times, educators or parents tend to limit children to a specific focus. You then deprive the child of exploring and trying new things," Singh remarked.

Quan also claims to be encouraging of her daughter's creative endeavours. "The character is very strict with her kids, and wants her elder son to be a doctor. I play a very *kiasu* (afraid of losing out) single mother," she said of Mei Feng. "But I feel that I'm very supportive of my own daughter's pursuit of her dreams. I found it very difficult to yell at Aloysius and Jordan because they're both such good kids," she said.

When asked if he was afraid of his on-screen, mum, Pang said, "We know what she's like in real life, I've seen her with her daughter and I felt very jealous because I wasn't nearly that close to my own mother at that age." He quickly offered the caveat, "but I am now".

Child actor Jordan Ng, who makes his acting debut in *Young & Fabulous*, insisted that Yi Fong's in-character strictness did not faze him. "Actually, I'm not scared of Feng-Jie. I think she really put a lot of effort into scolding me, but I'm still not scared." When asked if his real mum is scarier, Ng nodded readily. Ng juggled going to school and acting in the film with the help of a particularly kind teacher. "My teacher is very understanding and she didn't give me any homework," he said to gasps from the crowd. "To be fair to the whole class, she didn't give any homework to the rest of my classmates either." Quan said of the child actor, "He's a great kid, his parents have raised him very well. He was able to juggle his exams and his role in the film and was very conscientious in learning his lines. He's a very bright kid, he acted very naturally and nailed the Chinese pronunciation."









Veterans & Newcomers

Comedic actor Thia actually spoke very little during the press conference. An incident from earlier in his acting career was brought up by the directors: when filming the sketch show *Comedy Night*, Thia stumbled on a line and it resulted in over 50 outtakes. Quan even joked that Thia is considered one of the "three hazards" of the local entertainment industry, alongside working with children and animals. Co-director Lee then chimed in, saying that the script called for a dog, but fearing it would be too much to handle, the family pet was changed to a hamster instead.

Xu plays Chen Jun, a flamboyant cosplayer who seeks help in tailoring his costumes from Royston. "It's my first time cross-dressing for a film, [but] I have cross-dressed for a magazine photo-shoot before," Xu said. "I'm grateful that my parents raised me in such a way as to not find that taboo." He said he was very much into anime and manga while he was secondary school, commenting "I think it's very influential for my generation, so I did dabble in dressing up like the characters." In the film, Xu wears an E-cup bra, which he actually used to hold a cup of coffee when he had nowhere to put it.

Young & Fabulous marks the debut feature film score for Taiwanese composer JerryC. "I was really happy that I was hired for this and I think the directors are very brave, since I haven't composed a film score," he said. "In fact, when the idea was first mooted, I thought they were joking. I said, 'are you sure you want somebody new?' They told me they liked my songwriting style. I saw the film and was laughing throughout. I don't watch a lot of Singaporean movies in Taiwan. I thought it was funny and interesting, and I liked the message of chasing one's dreams. After watching the cut, I decided it was a good fit."

Young & Fabulous opens in Singapore cinemas on 26 May 2016.





PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW

Chen Bolin goes the *Distance* with three separate roles in the Anthony Chen-helmed short film trilogy about love and loss

By Leslie Wong

Not many 32-year-old actors can claim to have begun their showbiz careers in the last century. But Chen Bolin can. That cherubic mug of his belies a depth of experience stretching back 17 years and spanning the entire Asia-Pacific.

Watching him field interview questions like he's merely shooting the breeze with a group of friends, it's clear that Chen is an old hand at all this publicity rigmarole. Even when asked point blank whether he was panicking during a scene in which he had to bathe a baby, the patently childless actor doesn't bat an eyelid.

"Well, of course," he replies with a chuckle. "It was someone else's baby. I had to be careful. If it were my own [baby], I'd just…" And he mimes carelessly dumping the baby in the bathtub to general laughter all around. "In any case," he adds, "I just try to do my best."

Said baby-bathing scene occurs in local director Tan Shijie's segment of *Distance*, a short film trilogy executive-produced by Anthony Chen, in which Chen (Bolin, that is – hooray for common Chinese surnames!) takes on three different roles that all have the same surname (you guessed it: Chen). As Manager Chen, he travels to Guangxi for a business trip and unexpectedly runs into a father he never expected to see again. As Chen Deming, he travels to Singapore to arrange the last affairs of a long-lost friend now facing the death penalty. As Chen Zhibin, he travels to Thailand in search of a former mentor and old flame who mysteriously vanished from his life 12 years ago. And under his own name, he meets with the local press to discuss his involvement in the film and his plans moving forward.



What was it like working with Anthony Chen?

As an executive producer, he's someone who's very hard to surpass. He's in the thick of things every day, always the earliest to arrive and the latest to leave. He's very serious and dedicated… and also a bit of a control freak.

How is Anthony Chen a control freak?!

He literally controls everything, even down to what we eat! But I know it comes from a good place. He doesn't do it to gratify himself; he just wants the movie to be the best it can be.

How did you handle having to play three different characters in the same film?

When I was filming, there were times when I myself would feel a little mixed up. The time I had in between playing each role was very short and I didn't have many lines to play with, so I would occasionally mix up the emotions of the different characters. Ultimately, though, I think it's the incidents that the characters experience that gives each of them a unique personality.

Which of the three characters did you identify with the most?

I guess it would be Chen Zhibin, for the segment we filmed in Thailand. The first two short films deal with kinship and friendship respectively, neither of which I've had many problems with. The third short film's about romantic love, which hopefully I'll get to experience in the future. There's just a chance that I may find myself in the same position as Chen Zhibin someday.

You mean falling in love with an older woman?









I don't mean in a literal sense, but rather in the kind of emotional journey the character goes through. Age isn't an issue when the connection between two people is genuine. That was the part of the character that I felt resonated with me. All of the characters I play in *Distance* aren't defined by literal things like their occupations, but by their internalities and psychology. That's what I mean when I say I identify with Chen Zhibin.

How did you prepare for the role(s)?

It's an ongoing process. I always try to expose myself to different ideas, books and films so I'm better equipped to delve into the inner life of the characters I play. When I first entered the entertainment industry, I was pretty full of myself and thought I knew everything. That changed when I filmed [his breakout 2002 film] *Blue Gate Crossing*. [The film's director] Yee Chin-yen taught me how coming into contact with various ideas and films could make me a better actor. Initially, I had to force myself to do it, but over time it grew into a hobby and it's become an integral part of my life now.

How was your rapport with each of the three directors, who are all from different countries?

Quite good, I would say. With [Chinese director Xin] Yukun and Shijie, everything was very smooth. It was more challenging with [Thai director Sivaroj Kongsakul], because he doesn't speak English or Chinese. Communicating with each other would require a lot more time and effort.

What was it like working with experienced actors like Paul Chun and Jiang Wenli? Did any creative sparks fly in the process?

Definitely, with each and every one of my co-stars! The time I had to act opposite them felt too short. If I had my way, each short film would have been 40 minutes or longer [Note: they currently clock in at around 35 minutes each]. The experience was just extremely gratifying for me.

Most memorable moment of filming?

It's hard to choose, because it was three separate stories with their own highlights. If I could choose one from each short film, though… For the first short film, it would be the scene in the tea restaurant with Paul Chun. We were face to face, and at the end of it he patted me on the shoulder. That's the moment I felt was very special.

For the second film, Shijie's segment, it would have to be the first moment I laid eyes on Tony [Yang, who plays his death-row buddy]. The rush of emotions that one experiences upon being reunited with a long-lost friend, only to find out he's about to receive the death sentence, it's indescribable.

For the third short film, it'd be the final scene with Jiang Wenli in the hotel room, when my character can't decide whether to leave or stay. The past and present tugging you in opposite directions, it's that kind of feeling.

You had to kiss Jiang Wenli in that scene. What was that like for you? Did the two of you talk about how to approach it beforehand?

We did talk it over a little before shooting the scene. Shooting itself felt very comfortable and natural. I believe there were only one or two NGs. As I said, age isn't a big issue when the connection between two people is genuine, be they lovers or co-stars.

You've recently been making inroads into the Korean entertainment industry and have even signed with a Korean management agency. What are your immediate plans and how do you intend to balance your Korean and Chinese commitments?

I'd like to go on the record and clarify that I've never actually signed with a Korean management agency. I've had a few collaborations with the Koreans recently [he had a cameo in the Korean drama *Monster* and is paired up with *Running Man* regular Song Ji-hyo in the ongoing Chinese version of variety show *We Got Married*], but that's all it is. With regard to my immediate plans for the future, I think I'm going to take a short break. I've been working too hard recently! But not too long a break. I tend to get restless if I spend too much time away from acting and filming.

Distance opens on 2 June 2016.

A Singaporean film filled with martial arts skirmishes, explosive stunts, shootouts and high-speed chases? If 24-year-old actor/ producer Luke Lee has his way, that will soon become a reality.

F*** spoke to Luke about his upcoming film, *Burn*. Luke stars in the action-thriller as Shen, a hitman who is betrayed by his former boss and left for dead. In seeking revenge, Shen finds himself caught in the crossfire between two criminal empires which are tearing the city apart. Joining Luke in the cast are Pamelyn Chee, Paul Foster, Keagan Kang and Fish Chaar. Malaysian director James Lee, founder of Doghouse 73 Pictures, is helming the film. Principal photography is scheduled to take place from March to June of 2017 in Singapore, Malaysia and Canada.

Luke self-financed a proof-of-concept teaser trailer to drum up interest in and awareness of the project. The trailer features him as Shen taking on a horde of mercenary goons and duelling with co-star Pamelyn Chee using escrima sticks. He launched a month-long Indiegogo campaign in early May and has been meeting with investors and distribution companies.

The actor appeared in the first two films of the *Ah Boys To Men* series, as well as the supernatural comedy-drama *A Fantastic Ghost Wedding*. In the interview, Luke lays out his ambitions and how he and the cast and crew of *Burn* hope to fulfil them. He discusses his influences and inspirations, overcoming the difficulties of making a feature in a genre that is a rarity in the local film industry, the deviations from a normal film production process that he will be taking and shares his advice with those hoping to break into the industry.

F* Magazine: What action movies do you remember growing up with?**

Luke Lee: One of my favourites, the defining one, is *Fist of Fury*, Bruce Lee, 1972. It was also called *The Chinese Connection*. I think that one really, really pushed the whole genre forward; people had never seen action on that scale before. I can go on and on about martial arts films. I like Jackie Chan's *Drunken Master* as well, I like *Once Upon a Time in China*, I like quite a few. What really inspired me was *Fist of Fury*. Bruce Lee didn't make a lot of films, but the ones he did within his short but very impactful life, he really did pave the way for Asian martial artists to be taken seriously in Hollywood.

So your influences would mainly be Hong Kong martial arts films?

In terms of martial arts influence, yes, but with cinematography, it's a mixture. I'm a big fan of Christopher Nolan, I'm a big fan of David Fincher – *House of Cards*, *Gone Girl*, *Se7en* – I like these films where it's not black and white, where there are shades of grey. The way they see the world, the way they paint the world, it's through a warped sort of lens. Everything is kind of symbolic. You can see that in Chris Nolan's films as well, even in *Batman Begins*, in the superhero genre, it's quite symbolic.

Besides Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, are there any particular action stars whom you idolise?

Action stars, let me see…I'm a big fan of Tony Jaa, he's done some great stuff, and I think that's one of the reasons why I was motivated to do this film in Singapore. Our neighbours – Indonesia, Thailand – they're making these amazing, amazing action films, but with a significantly smaller budget than Hollywood, and you find that the action is actually on par, if not better. These people can do stuff without wires, that you haven't seen before. Stuff like *The Raid*, *The Raid 2*, Gareth Evans is doing a great job. Iko Uwais is another martial artist I think is doing a great job.

How did you come up with the idea for *Burn*?

I came up with it in my last year of university. I just came back from the U.K. last year, so it was in gestation. While I was in the U.K., I reached out to all my contacts in Singapore and L.A., just because I felt like if you want to do it, you want to do it well. You're only as good as your team, so the people you get on board, they're what the movie's about. You want to use their experience and it just raises the production value. If we bring in people from Hollywood, from Hong Kong, from Indonesia, from Thailand, it really goes towards what we want, which is elevating Singapore action cinema to an international stage. That's pretty much the vision.

Especially since Singapore action cinema doesn't really exist yet.

Yes, exactly. I was interested in the concept of saturation, of plateaus. I think the film industry anywhere, be it L.A. or Singapore, it has to keep pushing boundaries. When it comes to a point where there are too many films of a certain genre, then we need to actively think outside of our comfort zones and say, "hey, maybe we need to do something else." It's human nature, when you act within your comfort zones, you choose something that is safe, because you know there's a target audience with a built-in interest. If you don't create that indigenous genre of film, you're never going to have that audience, it's always just imported.

Everywhere around the world has their own action [films], if you think about it. Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the U.S. obviously, Canada, Japan and they all have their distinctive styles. Very different kinds of action. You have stuff like *Rurouni Kenshin* and *Attack on Titan*, they convert anime into live-action and the way it's done, it's very cinematic and they try to remain as true to the story as possible. We need to keep pushing. We want to attract people with the same vision, we want to keep having an open mind, being flexible and pushing boundaries.

There's an impression that it's very difficult getting an action-centric film made in Singapore, given all the logistics and the permits. How have you navigated these obstacles?

For Singapore, we are actually very well situated in Asia, being a trading hub. We are multi-lingual, specifically in English and Chinese, so with regards to being at the centre of things, I think we can agree that Singapore is very well-placed at the cross[roads] between east and west.

To answer your question, I would ask another question, which is completely counter-intuitive. The question is, "why haven't we made one yet?" Name me one local comedy – you can name so many. Name me one local action film. The point is that nothing comes to mind for the general public. We are somewhere where we have the perfect marriage between east and west, we are bilingual, I'm surprised that people haven't done it already. It goes back to the same thing – people are afraid of doing something that is outside of what they're used to. Obviously, you would work on what sells, that's the point of commercial filmmaking.

With regards to action, when they made the first *Raid*, there were no expectations, no name recognition – they just set out to do something, and they did it. That's what we want to do: we want to just build something which makes a name for Singapore and puts it out there. We're going to have quality action, have it be on par with Hollywood, or even better. We're doing *The Raid*-type, Netflix *Daredevil*-type of action. We're bringing people on board who have done that, on that level. This enhances production value, enhances the overall feel of it. We're talking to people who are interested in distributing internationally. After we tie that down, Singapore will be known for action.

In terms of logistics, I think it's best not to overthink it. At the start of something like this, an action film or something that seems insurmountable in Singapore, if you were to ask yourself, "oh my gosh, there's so much more to go, I'm never going to complete it," you'll never get it done. But if you approach it bit by bit, break it up, and ask around, eventually people will also find you. That's what has happened. We've put the feelers out and people are interested. That's what happens when you get ideas that have good energy.

We're doing reverse-engineering. Right now, we've met with a couple of interested production houses. These are international production houses. They take films that are indigenous, local films, doesn't matter which country – not Singapore, but other countries – and they



HEART'S ON FIRE

F*** chats exclusively with actor/producer Luke Lee on his plans for Singapore's first action-thriller blockbuster, *Burn*

By Jedd Jong

make it international; they specialise in that. With regards to reverse-engineering, we are selling distribution rights to the film before even making it, and that makes things easier. Rather than midway through production, you figure out who you're going to distribute it to, you have a ready-made audience of millions of people, you have the structure in place. So when production starts, you just focus on filming it.

You're no longer worrying about disseminating it, marketing, because all that will be handled with the distribution. I think that's the way to go. We're not just doing one [project], we're thinking long-term. Long-term, we want to create a path for young Singaporean filmmakers to say, "we can make these international productions", but we need to forge that path first.

What sets the character of Shen apart from your average action hero?

I think the character of Shen is quite different from other action heroes because he is not invulnerable. Shen isn't, he is a man, he's very aware of his own limitations. He goes through a lot of obstacles, and it's a mirror for what we all go through. I like to think of it as a [metaphor for] the way in which people go through the film industry. He goes through a crucible, a fire. When he comes out of it, he emerges stronger. What happens to him through that, how he becomes stronger, that's what we're interested in. I don't want to reveal too much [at this stage].

Have there been any ideas that you had to rule out because they turned out to be impractical?

I think in terms of action, I'm actually concerned with practical effects. I'm a big fan of real-life explosions, pyrotechnics, stunts. I don't believe in putting too much CGI in it, because I feel like it takes away the gravity and the intensity of it. I won't rule out anything. We're planning some pretty big-scale stuff in terms of action, but we're going to get it as practical as possible. If you're talking about building a set, we're going to build a set. If we want to throw someone through a wall, we're going to throw him through a wall – it won't be an actual wall. We want to see that, it won't just be green screen.

How do you reach a compromise between your vision and the resources you have at hand? Have you had to scale anything back from what you dreamt up?

That's a very good question. When I started out, the budget I had in mind was $1.5 – 2 million. I asked around, and this was the budget that I had quoted for a local film. Approximately $1.5 – 2 million – but this is not including action. This is just a local drama or a local comedy. When we're talking about action, you've got choreography, special effects, it all adds up, it really does, and an international cast adds up. I always knew that we had to scale it down if we had that kind of budget and that's why it's great to see people coming forward. We're thinking of bringing it up to…at least over $10 million. As much as you don't scale down your vision, that's better. You can just make a better quality product. If I were to do the film on $1.5 – 2 million, we'll have to scale down a lot of the stunts and the cast. Big compromises in terms of what we want to do – the equipment, everything.

In the U.S., a really cheap action movie costs $30 million.

Exactly. If you think about it, it's unimaginable for a filmmaker who's established in the U.S. to come here and do it on this kind of budget. Our budget for a local drama or comedy is their budget per episode for a show on the CW. It's quite amazing, the calibre of production value that goes into it. The scale is much bigger, even for a micro-budget film in the U.S. Our job is to make it on that scale.

You're aiming for something that has totally not been seen before from the local film industry.

Yes, that's why we're talking to people who want to support it. We're talking to investors and everyone, seeing who has the right vision, who has the right skillset so they can make this internationally. That's always been the goal in mind.

What would you say to anyone who doubts you or your cohorts in bringing this to fruition?

For me, I always say that, "everything is impossible until it's done." Look at Anthony Chen for example, a very talented fellow, fantastic director of *Ilo Ilo*. What happened was, he had a vision and he took it all the way. But you have to prove yourself first, then you can talk. That's what we're doing. We're going to prove ourselves first, then we'll take it long-term. If you want to get something in the industry, you have to move the ground. We want to disrupt the ecosystem, we want to make people think of things differently. If we can get young filmmakers on board, if we can get people who have never had the opportunity to do that, if they can come on board, all the better, because that sets a platform for future generations.

What did you learn about filmmaking from your roles in the *Ah Boys to Men* films?

I learnt that filmmaking is very much a collaborative effort. You're only as good as your team. You can be a very, very good actor or producer but if you're not with a good team and you don't have a strong overall vision, it's not going to work. You have to be very clear on what your creative direction is. I also found out acting is very fun. [*laughs*]

Ah Boys to Men was my first feature film after army. I did two films, then I went to the U.K. to study, then I came back, did a couple of others. Overall, if I could say why I'm interested in filmmaking beyond being an actor, I think it's kind of an expanded consciousness. That's the next step. That's why you see people like Ben Affleck and Sean Penn moving into directing and producing. It gives you more flexibility, it gives you more say and creative control in terms of what you want to express. And I think that's what we all want, it doesn't matter what art form, whether it's writing or acting or dance.

What has it been like working with director James Lee?

Maybe I should go back and tell you how I know James Lee. I saw his short *Last Day of School*. A brilliant piece of short film. It just really touched me, the intensity of it. And I thought to myself, "wow, if this guy can do something so short and make it so impactful, more impactful than anything I've ever seen locally, I think he can do an action film." He's done action before, he's done sci-fi before with that kind of scale. It's not like he's unfamiliar with how to deal with an ensemble cast and international people.

Having said that, I had a talk with him. My main concern, and we agreed on this, is that action is nothing without story. Action is rooted in story. If you have action without story, without a firm storyline, it is nothing, it is meaningless. Whatever it is, we have to go back to whether it furthers the plot and furthers the characters. So that's why James Lee. I'm delighted to be able to work with him and be on this journey with him. We'll see where it takes us, but I'm very positive.

You're in talks with Adrian Pang to play the villain Sebastian. How has the progress been on that front?

Currently, Adrian is busy with his play *Falling* for [his theatre company] Pangdemonium. He's going through the script and he's very interested. Right now, it's like pilot season but for theatre for him, so he's very busy and he doesn't have time [right now].

You would be willing to move the schedule around to accommodate him?

He will be free next year. In terms of the schedule, we tentatively have it March to June [2017] for production. If it clashes, my team will just work around it. I've always wanted to work with Adrian because I think he's fantastic, and when I thought of the character of Sebastian, I wrote it with Adrian in mind. You want to get someone you thought of. [*chuckles*] I've watched him since a long time ago, and in a way,

it's a full-circle thing. You'll see this concept of coming full circle, redemption, retribution, in the film as well.

Can you speak about the cast members you do have on board?

It's a very talented cast, they definitely have a very diverse range of experience between them, a mixture of both international and local productions. With Fish Chaar, he and I were in *Ah Boys to Men 1* and *2* together, so he's like my '*da ge*' (big brother). I've always said that I think he's great and I've always seen him as a mentor and a bit of a father figure. I wanted to preserve that, and that's why you see it in the movie as well, he plays a mentor figure to Shen. You can't fake that kind of bond, which we already have. I respect him a lot, and I think you can't buy that kind of connection, it doesn't come overnight. I've been very careful to get people who have a certain physicality. There's no point if you get good actors but they can't do the stunts; it's not believable. The cast has that physical element to them, they're all cross-trained in different kinds of martial arts. We'll have a training camp for them to go through the choreography.

Pamelyn Chee is playing an antagonist?

She is one of the antagonists, there are others as well. There are two large criminal factions – you have Adrian, whom we're in talks with, as Sebastian, the head of one organisation, and you have Keagan Kang, who's playing Damian, as the head of the other criminal organisation and they're both wrestling for control of the city. It's very interesting because I'm caught in the crossfire and I just want to figure out a way to end this constant violence, the violence which permeates the city. I'm very aware that I'm a player in it, that I'm a part of it, and there has to be a way out. That's what Shen wants to do, that's why we see his humanity as well. He is struggling with these concerns and he is struggling with what he has to do versus what he was trained to do.

Is it like a high-tech gang war that Shen is caught in the middle of?

It's a high-tech gang war but in a way, it's also very Shakespearean. I see it as a bit like *House of Cards* and *Game of Thrones*. You have these houses with different agendas and different leaders. Is Shen going to pit them against each other? Is he going to defeat one of them and take it over? How do you get out of the system? I think it's very interesting, because it has a lot of parallels with political climates and today's financial markets.

Is it being set in Singapore or are you keeping the setting vague?

We're keeping the setting vague. Parts of it will be shot in Singapore [and others] will be shot in Malaysia, Indonesia and also in Vancouver. I have a couple of good friends there, they film *Arrow* there, they film *Pretty Little Liars* there, and Pinewood Studios is there. They go there because it's cheaper, the tax breaks, and also I think there's such good weather. [*laughs*]





What has the crowdfunding process been like?

The main purpose of crowdfunding was to get people interested in being a part of the movie. Most commercial productions, they don't release the details of how they make the movie until just before they release it. We want to get people involved from the get-go so when it comes out, they can go, "oh wow, this has come to fruition." I think when they're a part of it from the beginning, it is much more organic and fulfilling; that's the aim of crowdfunding.

Are you happy with the response that you've gotten so far?

Hmm, I would say that in terms of crowdfunding, for Singapore, we have our own private investors. So in terms of raising money, that's not make-or-break. In Singapore, we have a lot more to go in terms of people being interested in local films, the awareness. With regards to opportunities, you want to create opportunities for people and pave the way for young filmmakers who want to do something in the future. When you get going, the start is always going to be difficult.

Here, we are very exposed to overseas productions, we're only used to a specific genre for local productions. We don't want to do what works already. Whenever you do that, you take a risk and you push the envelope. I would say the fact that we started the crowdfunding campaign and some people have donated already is a sign that people are interested. We have people contacting us outside of crowdfunding saying that they want to get involved in a different capacity – music composition, cinematography – and these are from Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong. It's heartening, because everyone from Asia and beyond comes together.

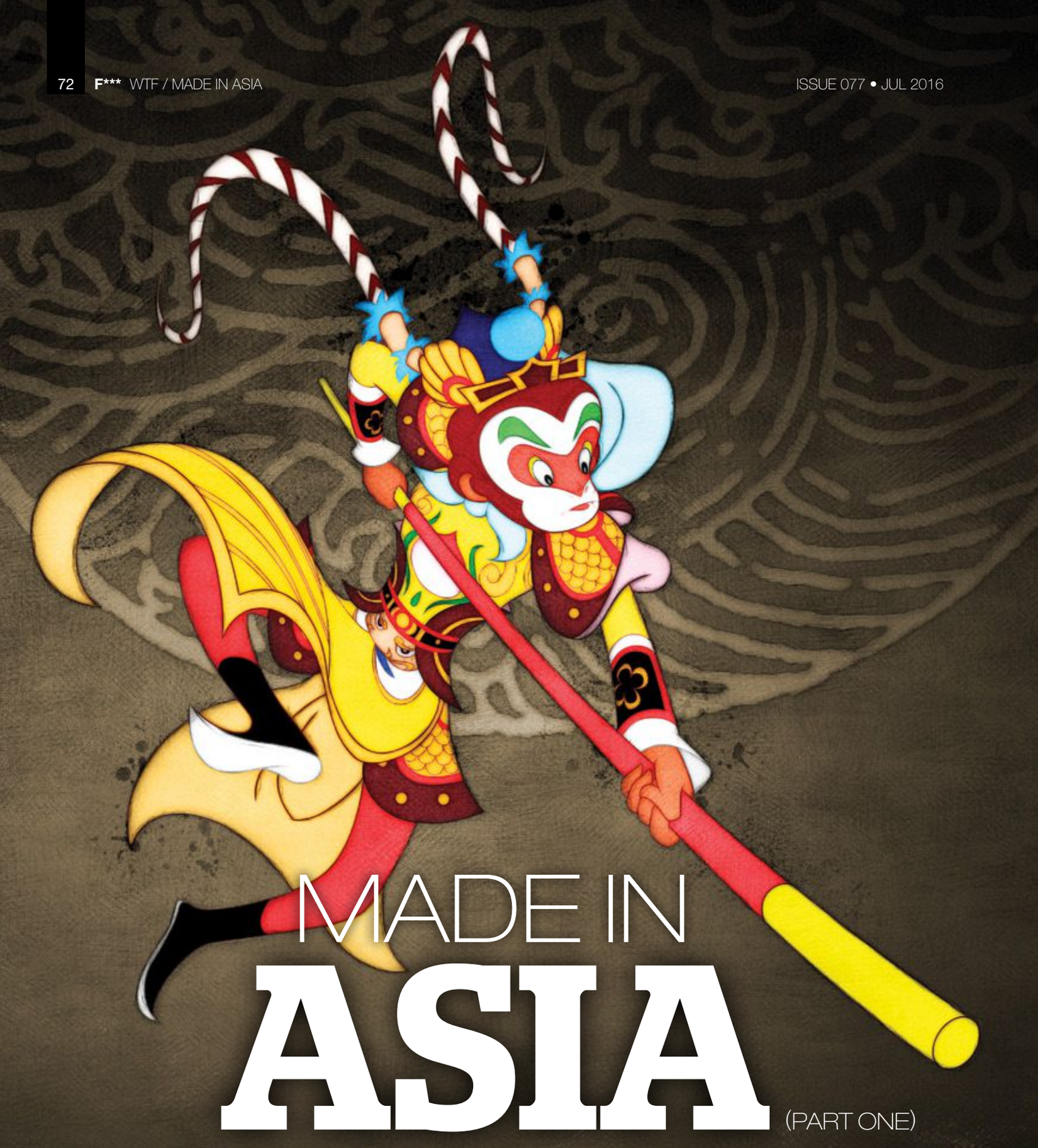
Is there anything you'd like to say to anyone out there who would like to get into filmmaking but is doubtful or afraid?

I would just say jump into the deep end. You don't learn by wading in the kiddie pool. You need to jump into the deep end. You need to feel the current, know where the current is going and make an active effort to swim. Either against it or with it, but at least you're in the deep end.

I have an agent in London as well; I can tell you first-hand that the level of competition in the filmmaking industry in the U.K. and the U.S. is very, very high, it is so much more competitive than here. If we are going to produce anything of that standard, we need to up our game. That means we need to make sure that we have these opportunities for people. Even in the U.K. where it's so competitive, there are so many people who go to theatre and film school – how many of these people [actually] get to become actors or directors? A lot of people don't.

When you're doing theatre or film, there is no guarantee, unlike [conventional] professions. When you go into it, you're taking a risk. If you create opportunities for others and you have the capacity to, then you should, because it's a civic duty, it's giving back to the community. I say I'm doing this not because I should, but because I must, because I feel that I would sleep better at night because it's in my power to do this. Whatever I'm able to do, I'll do. Again, going back to it, pushing boundaries and raising the bar. For filmmakers, don't be afraid of getting rejected. You're going to be rejected so many times that eventually, you're going to realise that it's part of the process and there is really no such thing as failure, only lessons.

To find out more about *Burn*, visit http://www.burnmovieofficial.com/



MADE IN ASIA (PART ONE)

Hollywood isn't the only one that has made waves with their animated films; Asian animation is worthy of a shoutout too

By Jonathan Sung

First came Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty's Aurora, The Little Mermaid Arielle, Beauty & The Beast's Belle and a whole bevy of 2D princess beauties courtesy of Disney, then Dreamworks Animation tickled our funny bone with Shrek and his fairy tale entourage, the zany Madagascar quartet, Kung Fu Panda Po and the Furious Five.

And of course, Pixar introduced us all to a whole new third dimension with talking toys, cutesy bugs, lovable monsters, a culinary chef rat and endearing fishes, like Nemo and Dory who swims into our cinemas yet again this month with the latest 3D animated feature, Finding Dory.

Our love affair with animation has certainly come a long way over the decades, since Snow White and the Seven Dwarves made its cinematic debut back in 1937. But did you know that here in the East, there have been plenty of notable animated features too that are just as worthy to be placed on the same pedestal as their Western counterparts? Join us as we take a walk down memory lane and relive the memories of the first five of our ten all-time favourite Eastern animated gems.



1. The Tale of the White Serpent (Hakujaden) *(1958, Japan)*

Chances are, if you were born in the 1960s or 1970s, as a kid, you would probably have watched this animated feature when it was broadcast on television during our Lunar New Year festive holidays back in the 1980s. Although dubbed in either English or Mandarin back on our goggle box back then, this animated feature actually originated from Japan.

Released in Japan by Toei Animation in 1958 and later in America in 1961, under the title of *Panda and the Magic Serpent*, the film is based on the famous Chinese folklore 'The Legend of the White Snake', which has definitely seen its fair share of adaptation on film and television. It was said that the decision to base this large-scale Japanese major animation film project on a Chinese mythical tale was made by producer and Toei President Hiroshi Okawa, as a reconciliatory gesture towards China.

Written by Taiji Yabushita and Shin Uehara, the storyline remains mostly unchanged, including the names and the traditional Chinese appearance of the main characters White Snake Bai Niang, Scholar Xu Xian, White Snake's lady-in-waiting and confidant Xiao Qing and their monk adversary Fa Hai. However, in its attempt to emulate American feature animation studios such as Disney, the film added cutesy elements, much like Snow White and Sleeping Beauty's forest creature friends and Cinderella's household pet pals, in the form of the lovable, rotund Panda and red panda Mimi as Xu Xian's pet companions, as well as several animal street urchins.

Although it was not the runaway success in the 1960s as its producers had hoped for when initially released in the United States, the film gained great popularity as a cult classic over the years and is widely considered to be a pioneer in Japanese animation and inspired many Japanese animators in the years to come, including Studio Ghibli co-founder Miyazaki Hayao.





2. The Monkey King: Uproar In Heaven (大闹天宫) *(1964, China)*

The Monkey King And The Fruit Of Immortality (人参果) *(1981, China)*

The Golden Monkey Conquers The Evil (金猴降妖) *(1985, China)*







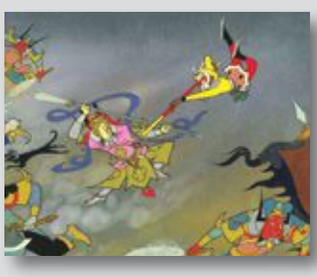
Besides *The Tale of the White Serpent*, another regular cartoon fixture on our local television during the Lunar New Year holidays back in the 1980s was the Monkey God animated films produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio (SAFS).

Highly regarded as the animation giant of the East, the SAFS was the creative playground of the Wan Brothers, Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, Wan Chaochen and Wan Dihuan, who were revered as the forefathers and forerunners of the animation industry in China. And the Monkey King animated films could be considered to be the best brainchild created by the formidable four, spun off from the success of their first black-and-white animated film *Princess Iron Fan* from 1941, also adapted from the 16th Century Chinese classic – Journey to the West.

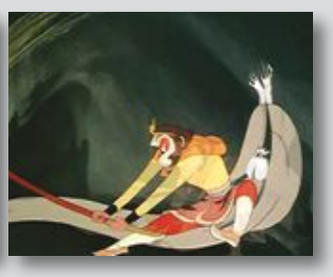
Directed by eldest brother Wan Laiming and produced by all four Wan Brothers, the first of the Monkey God films, *Uproar in Heaven*, actually took two long decades before it came to fruition. Although plans for the film started back in 1941, hot on the heels of the publicly-acclaimed *Princess Iron Fan*, production unfortunately came to an abrupt halt due to its financial investors backing out in the face of the Pacific War and, later, the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War. It was not until 1954 when Wan Laiming returned to Shanghai, in acceptance of the role of SAFS' Director, did the production finally pick up from where it left off and the film was eventually completed over the span of 10 years.

Behind the facade of vibrantly water-coloured scenery, vividly hand drawn characters and the rousing Peking opera styled orchestral accompaniment, on the surface the film, although greatly appealed to kids and adults alike with its mythical storyline, actually had revolutionary connotations. During that tumultuous time, Chairman Mao was likened to Sun Wukong in the first half of the film when he went forth with his Great Leap Forward and destabilised the entire country, much like the mischievous Sun when he stole the golden staff from the Eastern Ocean and threw the entire sea kingdom into disarray and later wreaked havoc in the heavenly kingdom. The metaphorical comparison then continued into the latter half of the film where the Jade Emperor, bearing a mole similarly positioned to that on Mao's chin, struggled to put a stop to Sun's chaos, bearing an uncanny resemblance to Mao's efforts to quell the uprising in China.

Unsurprisingly, in less than a year following its release, despite its many accolades, the film was banned in China and the entire Chinese animation industry was forcibly shuttered by the Cultural Revolution, with Wan Laiming and many other animators prosecuted and sent to reform through hard labour on farms and factories. It was not until 1978, after the Cultural Revolution had ended, that the national ban on the film finally got lifted, paving the way for two more successful sequels to carry on the legacy of the Wan Brothers.









3. Nezha Conquers the Dragon King (哪吒闹海) *(1979, China)*

Following The Monkey King film series, the next critically acclaimed animated feature film to be produced by the Shanghai Animation Film Studio (SAFS) was *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King*. Released in 1979, the film was created as a tribute to the 30th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Based on yet another 16th Century Chinese classic, Feng Shen Bang (封神榜), literally translated as The Apotheosis of Heroes or The Canonisation of the Gods, the film retells the familiar origins tale of the Third Lotus Prince toddler deity Nezha and his feud with the villainous Eastern Sea Dragon King Ao Guang.

Helmed by directors Wang Shuchen, Yan Dingxian and Xu Jingda, the talented trio carried on where the Wan Brothers left off and impressively produced the very first widescreen animated feature film in China that yet again received both public and critical acclaim for its breathtaking illustrations, poignant storyline and invigorating orchestral soundtrack.

Like The Monkey King film series, *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King* also received its fair share of award honours, including Best Animation at the 3rd Hundred Flowers Awards in 1980, the People's Republic of China Ministry of Culture's Outstanding Film Award in 1979 and the Special Award at the Manila International Film Festival in 1983. It was also the pioneer Chinese animated feature film to be screened at the Cannes Film Festival back in 1980.

And as proof of how the film had stood the test of time and remains well-loved to this era, as a tribute to the film's 35th anniversary, both Google Hong Kong and Google Taiwan featured the animated titular character as their Google Doodle theme on their search engine's homepage on 30 May 2014.





4. Nobita's Dinosaur (Doraemon: Nobita No Kyoryu)

(1980, Japan)



Before Hello Kitty frenzy seized the world and everyone went pretty gaga in pink, the Japanese animated icon that captured the hearts of millions came in the form of a male robot cat by the name of Doraemon, who had turned from yellow to blue, having sobbed for days after his ears were chewed off and eaten by rats.

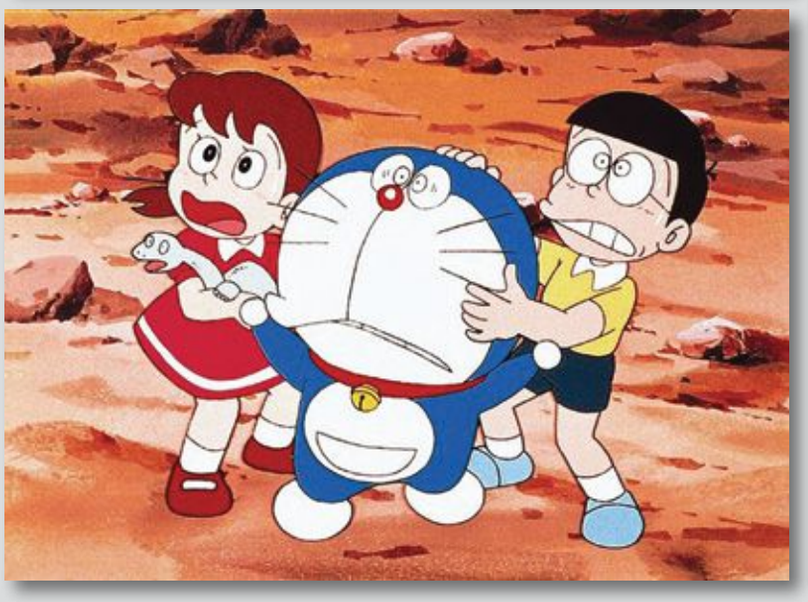
Together with his owner Nobita Nobi, Nobita's best friend and lady love Shizuka Minamoto and Nobita's bullying frenemies Takeshi Goda and Suneo Honekawa, the motley bunch boasts a jaw-droppingly impressive total of 45 volumes of manga volumes, 2,191 television episodes over three series and 37 animated feature length films so far since its creation in 1969.

Well deserving of a mention in our list of notable animated feature films is definitely the very first of the 37 Doraemon films, *Nobita's Dinosaur*, which was also the highest worldwide grossing animated feature film of 1980, having raked in a whopping ¥1,550 million.

Taking its storyline from a Doraemon comic strip first published in Weekly Shonen Sunday in 1975, the film relates the exciting adventures of Doraemon, Nobita and their friends as they time travel back 100 million years to return a baby Futabasaurus to its era-appropriate habitat.

With a brand new Doraemon cast and significant advances in animation technology, the film was remade in 2006 with great success. Although, unlike its predecessor, it did not top the list that year as the highest-grossing movie, it still managed to gross over ¥3.28 billion at the box office.













5. Older Master Cute Trilogy

Older Master Cute (七彩卡通老夫子)

(1981, Hong Kong)

Older Master Cute Part 2 (七彩卡通老夫子：水虎传)

(1982, Hong Kong)

Older Master Cute Part 3 (山.T. 老夫子)

(1991, Hong Kong)

In this day and age, where speed is key, ten-minute haircuts are part and parcel of our everyday life. But for those of us who were born at least two decades earlier, one of our fondest childhood memories would be burying our noses in the Old Master Q comic books while waiting our turn for our haircut at the barber shop. Hence, imagine our delight when our favourite bespectacled, skinny, elderly character and his friends, Big Potato and Mr Chin, made the leap from the comic strip onto the big screen in his very first animated feature length film!

Much like the recent *Peanuts Movie*, the first *Older Master Cute* film released in 1981 was in essence a continuation of the satirical sarcasm reflective of the Hong Kong social trends and issues back in the 1960s to 1980s, such as the erosion of moral values in modern society and the overt influence and emulation of Western cultures, as reflected in the comic book series created by Alfonso Wong.

From taking up kung fu lessons under the tutelage of the legendary Bruce Lee, to travelling back in time to the Water Margin era and making friends with an extraterrestrial supernatural being, through the use of local lingo and slapstick spoof-tastic humour, this trio of animated feature films not only successfully tickled the funny bone of Asian audiences, but also attained cult animation film status, winning over numerous Old Master Q fans as well as many animation aficionados too.









THE NETFLIX FRONTIER

How the web streaming giant is making its mark in the movies

By Jedd Jong

If you asked anyone what Netflix was 10-15 years ago, they'd answer, "oh, they mail DVDs to your house."

Netflix still does the DVD-by-mail thing, but that's peripheral now - it's leading the revolution in a whole different way. The business has evolved into a force to be reckoned with in the entertainment industry, ushering in a paradigm shift in the way media is consumed. The company has even entered popular culture vernacular by way of the phrase "Netflix and chill", a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

Netflix was founded in 1997 and began offering online streaming services 10 years later. In 2016, Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, Pakistan and Taiwan joined the over 190 countries in which Netflix is available online. A prime example of a business adapting to the times, Netflix's ferocious growth threatened brick-and-mortar DVD rental stores, and was one of the main factors in rental chain Blockbuster Video going out of business.

Netflix dipped its toe into original content with its film distribution and production arm Red Envelope Entertainment, created to generate exclusive content for its DVD-by-mail service. Red Envelope Entertainment was eventually shuttered in 2008, but Netflix would return to original content in a big way. The Norwegian-American crime comedy/drama show *Lilyhammer* was brought into the U.S. by Netflix after airing in Norway.

The political drama *House of Cards*, which debuted in 2013, was a game-changer for Netflix. The show was a remake of the British series of the same name, in turn based on novels by Michael Dobbs. *House of Cards* garnered considerable attention with the big names involved, including stars Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright and producer David Fincher, who also directed the pilot episode. *House of Cards* became the first online series to be nominated for Primetime Emmy Awards, with 33 nominations and six wins so far.

Netflix also became a home for TV shows that had been cancelled or dropped by other networks, producing continuations of *Arrested Development*, *The Killing* and *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, among others. *Orange is the New Black* and *Narcos* garnered critical acclaim,



while the likes of *Hemlock Grove* and *Marco Polo* received predominantly unfavourable reviews. Netflix signed a lucrative five-season deal with Marvel Studios/Disney, leading to the production of *Daredevil*, *Jessica Jones* and the upcoming *Luke Cage* and *Iron Fist* series, which will culminate *The Defenders*. Netflix's model of releasing all episodes of a given season at once is conducive to binge-watching; binge-watchers generally have to wait for a TV show to conclude and get a home video release before partaking.

It wasn't long before Netflix entered film distribution and production, upending the status quo and causing major theatre chains significant alarm. Just like any studio, Netflix has had its hits and misses with its feature films. While many felt *Beasts of No Nation* was snubbed at the Oscars, two Netflix documentaries, *What Happened, Miss Simone?* and *Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight For Freedom* were nominated for Best Documentary Feature Oscars the same year.

F*** takes a look at the movies Netflix has released so far:

BEASTS OF NO NATION

Netflix acquired the distribution rights to this war drama, written and directed by Cary Joji Fukanaga and based on Uzodinma Iweala's novel of the same name. The film centres on a young boy named Agu (Abraham Attah) who lives in an unspecified West African country. As the government falls and rebels seize control of the country, Agu is recruited by a warlord known only as The Commandant (Idris Elba), becoming a boy soldier in his ranks. The sobering, uncompromising film was widely lauded by critics, with both newcomer Attah and star Elba's performances garnering positive reactions. *Beasts of No Nation* was released simultaneously on Netflix and in cinemas, which was seen as a violation of traditional 90-day exclusivity period typically enjoyed by theatres. AMC Cinemas, Carmike Cinemas, Cinemark, and Regal Entertainment Group, four of the largest cinema chains in the U.S., boycotted *Beasts of No Nation*. When Elba and Attah were not nominated for Academy Awards, it was perceived as a sign of fear of the new media distribution model championed by Netflix. However, Elba was nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Golden Globe, and won the Best Supporting Actor prize at the Screen Actors Guild awards.



THE RIDICULOUS 6

On the other end of the scale is a film that exactly zero people felt were snubbed at the Oscars. In fact, 'exactly zero' is the critics score for this movie on review aggregating site Rotten Tomatoes. Adam Sandler had been developing his parody western flick and it had been dropped by Columbia Pictures, Paramount Pictures and Warner Bros., before being picked up by Netflix. Netflix inked a four-picture deal with Sandler and his production company Happy Madison. *The Ridiculous 6* stars Sandler, Terry Crews, Jorge Garcia, Taylor Lautner, Rob Schneider, Luke Wilson, Nick Nolte, Will Forte, Nick Swardson and Steve Zahn, with cameos from the likes of Harvey Keitel, Steve Buscemi, Blake Shelton and Vanilla Ice. Quite infamously, a dozen Native American cast members, including the cultural advisor, quit the production out of anger at the stereotypical portrayal of their people in Sandler's movie.



CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON: SWORD OF DESTINY

Harvey Weinstein, a major Hollywood power player, entered into a deal with Netflix to produce the sequel to 2000's martial arts epic *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. This time, director Ang Lee was not involved, with Michelle Yeoh being the only cast member to reprise her role from the original. Action choreographer Yuen Woo-ping succeeded Lee in the director's chair, with the cast including Donnie Yen, Harry Shum Jr., Natasha Liu Bordizzo, Jason Scott Lee, Eugenia Yuan and Juju Chan. The film revolves around a quest for the Green Legend, the mythical sword wielded by Li Mu Bai, Chow Yun Fat's character from the original. The film is adapted from Wuxia novelist Wang Dulu's *Iron Knight, Silver Vase*, the fifth book in his *Crane-Iron* series (*Crouching Tiger* is the fourth book). The decision was made to shoot the movie in English, and the performers' varying competency in the language proved distracting to many viewers. The general critical consensus was that *Sword of Destiny* fell far short of the first film.





PEE-WEE'S BIG HOLIDAY

Pee-wee Herman, the childlike, optimistic character created by actor Paul Reubens with the late Phil Hartman, is often called 'the American Mr. Bean'. Reubens first conceptualised the character during his days as part of the influential comedy troupe The Groundlings, and later created a stage show starring Pee-wee. Pee-wee made the leap to feature films with *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* in 1985, the directorial debut of Tim Burton. The children's TV show *Pee-wee's Playhouse* followed, with Reubens toning down the adult innuendo so the character would be more appropriate for younger audiences. Pee-wee's second movie, *Big Top Pee-wee*, was released in 1988 to generally negative reviews. Since then, fans have been waiting on a third Pee-wee movie, which finally arrived in 2016 in the form of Netflix's *Pee-wee's Big Holiday*. In this movie, Pee-wee meets and befriends actor Joe Manganiello (playing himself), who convinces Pee-wee to embark on an epic trip to New York to celebrate Joe's birthday. The film received largely positive reviews, with critics praising its nostalgia factor, even if it didn't approach the outright wackiness of the character's earlier outings.



SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

At the time of writing, Netflix's latest movie is the comedy-drama *Special Correspondents*, written, directed by and starring Ricky Gervais and released on April 29. The film is a remake of the 2009 French comedy *Envoyés très spéciaux*. Eric Bana co-stars as a brash hotshot radio journalist, with Gervais playing his technician. Together, they hatch a scheme to fake their kidnapping during a military coup in Ecuador for the attention, when they're actually hiding out in a diner in New York. The cast also includes Vera Farmiga, Kelly Macdonald, Benjamin Bratt and America Ferrara. Bana may be largely known as a serious dramatic actor and sometime-action star, but he started out as a cast member on the Australian sketch comedy TV show *Full Frontal*. "I saw the French version of the film and I was pretty confident that Ricky could do a funnier version of that," Bana said. "Ricky didn't actually know about my comedy background so a lot of the stuff just came about with us having fun on the shoot."

Netflix's upcoming slate includes the remaining three movies out of Adam Sandler's four-picture deal with Netflix. *The Do-Over*, an action-comedy starring Sandler and oft-collaborator David Spade, released on Netflix on 27th May. Later this year, there's *War Machine*, a war comedy-drama starring Brad Pitt and Ben Kingsley. Pitt's wife Angelina Jolie is directing and co-writing *First They Killed My Father*, a biopic based on the life of Cambodian human rights activist Loung Ung. When the U.S. distributor of *The Little Prince*, an animated adaptation of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's novel, dropped the film without explanation, Netflix picked up distribution rights. *Mascots*, the latest mockumentary from Christopher Guest (*This Is Spinal Tap*, *Best In Show*, *A Mighty Wind*) is also upcoming. With a packed and varied slate, Netflix is just starting out in its quest for supremacy in the film distribution market, and all the major players are having the re-evaluate the way they do business.





*** R(A)

REVIEWS ANONYMOUS

A Hologram For The King

Distance

Teenage Mutant Ninja

Turtles: Out of the Shadows

The Angry Birds Movie

X-Men Apocalypse

Young & Fabulous

And more...

Me Before You

A charming flick that is guaranteed to bring a tear to your eye – unless you're terribly cynical. Or a man.

A HOLOGRAM FOR THE KING

Genre: Comedy, Drama **Director**: Tom Tykwer
Cast: Tom Hanks, Alexander Black, Sarita Choudhury, Sidse Babett Knudsen, Tracey Fairaway **Rating**: M18 (Sexual Scene)/98 mins **Opens**: 2 June 2016

RATING ★★★½☆





Our fellow reviewer hit the nail on the head when he labelled *London Has Fallen* 'hilariously jingoistic'. American white male saviour swoops into foreign country, causes massive collateral damage (hooray for Second Amendment rights!) and ends up saving the asses of hapless citizens of said foreign country. A more pacifist but no less patronising variant has the White Messiah (usually Tom Cruise in one form or another) swoop into foreign country, teach the barbaric inhabitants the 'right' (i.e. American) way of doing things and save them from their own decadence and corruption. *A Hologram for the King* boasts America's other favourite Tom (Hanks) as a fish-out-of-water businessman navigating the alien landscape of Saudi Arabia, but thankfully does away with the 'America knows best' mindset. It's still unlikely to win many fans in the Arabian Peninsula, but at least its heart is in the right place. Sort of.

Alan Clay (Hanks) is a typical mid-life crisis sufferer sent to Saudi Arabia to sell a holographic teleconferencing system to its king (hence the movie's title). There's nothing much to distinguish Clay from countless other down-on-their-luck middle-aged men, but Hanks is so good at playing the everyman that it's hard to not let him get away with it. You really feel for the guy as he's stonewalled by impassive bureaucrats, harangued by his soon-to-be-ex-wife or flummoxed by the strangeness of Saudi Arabian customs. As an American vantage point into Middle Eastern culture, Clay is as inoffensive as they can get, a deeply flawed individual who is hardly in any position to judge the locals he comes across. Clay's interactions with his ad-hoc chauffeur Yousef (Alexander Black) and physician Zahra (Sarita Choudhury) are rarely condescending in themselves, though it's quite another matter entirely when taken in context.

Cue massive onset of socio-political complications. While Clay is indeed as inoffensive as an American in the Middle East for the first time can be, he's still an American in the Middle East for the first time. Gags involving ubiquitous public executions and the impossibility of procuring a can of beer are par for the course. An illegal (albeit unplanned) trip to the holy city of Mecca, which is forbidden for all non-Muslims, is likely to ruffle even more feathers. *A Hologram for the King* was filmed in Morocco and Egypt instead of in Saudi Arabia itself, and it's easy to see why the Saudi Arabian authorities might have denied the production's request for on-location filming.

And then there are the castings of non-Arabs Choudhury and Black in Arab roles. Having made her film debut in the Mira Nair-helmed *Mississippi Masala* with Denzel Washington, Choudhury is no stranger to portraying strong female characters who chafe against the weight of tradition. She plays Zahra as very much Alan Clay's equal, even after they embark on a romantic relationship, but her character exhibits a degree of liberalism that might be uncomfortable for Muslim women in the audience to watch. The controversial nature of the role could account for why Choudhury was cast instead of an Arab actress, but not for Black's casting as Yousef. To Black's credit, he rattles off lines in Arabic and inhabits the role with such conviction that most non-Arab viewers will be fooled (this reviewer certainly was), but is it really necessary to cast yet another white actor in an ethnic role when actors of Arabic descent struggle to find roles that aren't either terrorists or arms-dealers?

There's also, strangely enough, some anti-Chinese sentiment of the undercutting-American-economy-with-cheap-labour variety, and before you complain about how random this point feels in relation to the rest of the review, that's exactly how it feels in relation to the rest of the film. Attempting to increase understanding of one widely-misunderstood country while simultaneously throwing shade on another is a bizarre strategy, to say the least.

An issue with diversity casting and incongruous China-bashing aside, *A Hologram for the King* isn't actually a bad film. The connection forged between Clay and Zahra feels genuine, and the Saudi Arabia of the film isn't just some exotic backwater begging for American intervention. It's a country with its own set of problems, but problems that are no worse than those in any other country. Most of the less superficial jokes are pretty funny, and there's an element of mild social satire in play that juxtaposes Saudi and American society, ultimately finding both lacking. Director Tom Tykwer also directed Hanks in *Cloud Atlas*, and some of that film's complex multiplicity has translated over into *A Hologram for the King*. Just not enough to make you forget about the whole casting debacle.

Summary: A rare dissonant voice in the sea of Hollywood movies branding the entire Islamic world as jihadists, but unfortunately undermined by minor cultural insensitivity and a controversial casting policy.

Leslie Wong

DISTANCE
再见，在也不见

Genre: Drama **Directors**: Xin Yukun, Tan Shijie, Sivaroj Kongsakul **Cast**: Chen Bolin, Paul Chun, Jiang Wenli, Yeo Yann Yann, Cheng Huan-Lin, Tony Yang **Rating**: PG13 (Brief Nudity)/108 mins **Opens**: 2 June 2016

RATING ★★★½☆





Film anthologies. Sigh. The best of them flow seamlessly like a river on its inexorable course, while those on the opposite end of the spectrum give Frankenstein's monster a run for its mismatched money. *Distance* falls somewhere in between, with three segments of differing quality combining to form a whole that is somewhat connected, if not quite faultlessly woven together. None of the vignettes are badly shot (one in particular is even quite good), but the pedigree of a film anthology lies in its summative impact, and *Distance*'s is just a little too diffused to execute the good old one-two-three punch.

Anthony Chen's production house Giraffe Films returns with a short-film trilogy that, while featuring the *Ilo Ilo* wunderkind only in an executive producing role, seems to be in fairly good hands nonetheless. Taiwanese actor Chen Bolin plays three different roles that are supposed to encapsulate changes in the dynamics of separation and communication in the Internet age (wah *cheem*) and it's interesting to see how each director's vision impacts upon his performance, which in any case vindicates his position as one of Taiwan's most promising young actors.

Chinese director Xin Yukun turns in a fairly conventional tale of long-lost fathers and bratty millennial teenagers set in Guangxi, and it's really nothing that we haven't seen before. Paul Chun is perfectly cast as the not-dad-of-the-year, but the short film doesn't break any new ground. Yes, kids these days are obsessed with their gadgets and are self-entitled beyond belief. That's the case in nearly every consumerist society, but director Xin can't pin down anything more specific than that and illuminate his specifically southern Chinese context.

There's comparatively more contextual flavour in the segment helmed by Thai director Sivaroj Kongsakul, about the reunion between a university professor and her former pupil twelve years after an ill-fated affair. The overall theme of physical and metaphorical distances is more pertinently evoked here, as Chen and Chinese actress Jiang Wenli play out the emotional skirmishes their respective characters partake in before finally shattering each other's facades. Kongsakul also discourses on the social media effect and the transience of online relationships, but at least ties it in with his plot somewhat so that it doesn't feel like mere lip service to the anthology's larger dictates. The sub-plot involving a Thai-Chinese university student's crush on Chen's character (mirroring his feelings for his own professor) isn't as well-handled, coming off as slightly extraneous, but is a good vehicle for showing off Thailand's hitherto untapped pool of effectively bilingual actors.

Not to toot our own horn, but Singaporean director Tan Shijie's segment is easily the best of the three. The rating at the bottom of the page is fully justified on the strength of Tan's work alone, in spite of whatever flaws the film may otherwise demonstrate. Depicting the operation of our draconian justice system on naughty foreign nationals may not seem like a prudent way to grab eyeballs, but Tan weaves his tangled web adroitly enough to circumvent any outright controversy. The various subtexts running through Tan's story of two childhood friends reconnecting just as one of them is about to receive the death penalty will provoke a lot of are-they-or-aren't-they speculation without actually resolving anything.

Tony Yang Yo-ning cameos as the adult version of Chen Bolin's death-row buddy, but it's the two young actors who play the characters' younger versions who steal the show with their raw intensity. *Ilo Ilo*'s other breakout Yeo Yann Yann doesn't have much to do as a stern prison warden, though that's really a minor gripe in a short film that begs to be re-watched so as to capture every single nuance and ambiguity. It even ties in uncannily with Xin's prior segment to the extent that you'll find yourself wondering for a moment if Chen is still playing the same character. Now that's what's known as synergy.

Casting Chen as three different characters undoubtedly provides *Distance* with a certain amount of constancy, but the possible exception of Tan's segment aside, none of the three short films meaningfully engage with each other. All three short films revolve more or less around the same macro concept, but come at it in such different ways that the macro concept becomes more like a vague indicator of direction than an actual unifying element. Many times, two of the films will engage with a particular sentiment or phenomenon, only for the third to bypass it completely. It's understandably difficult for directors working in three different countries to work completely in sync, but more attention should have been paid to how each entry resonates with the others.

Summary: Three short films running the gamut from passable to intriguing, *Distance* is a credible cross-country production hampered by a relative lack of thematic unity.

Leslie Wong

ME BEFORE YOU

Genre: Drama/Romance **Director**: Thea Sharrock
Cast: Emilia Clarke, Sam Claflin, Janet McTeer, Charles Dance, Jenna Coleman, Matthew Lewis, Vanessa Kirby, Stephen Peacocke, Brendan Coyle **Rating**: PG13 **Runtime**: 1 hr 50 mins **Opens**: 2 June 2016

RATING ★★★★½





When a movie is described as a 'chick flick', it automatically loses credibility with many moviegoers for some reason. 'Serious' moviegoers dismiss it as flippant and not worthy of 90-or-so minutes of their time, or the price of a cinema ticket.
While we admit that there have been some duds in this genre over the years – which genre hasn't had them? – there is no reason to dismiss a movie just because it might be considered superficial or frivolous.

Because of its boy-meets-girl-boy-falls-in-love-with-girl storyline, *Me Before You* might be described as a chick flick too but it's a heck of a lot more than that. Yes, it will undoubtedly attract a more female audience but that doesn't mean that men shouldn't watch it.

The story revolves around 26-year-old Lou Clark (Clarke), who lives in a small town in England and seems perfectly content with her simple life, loving family and not-so-loving boyfriend. Until she loses her job in a tea shop (yes, she's *that* English) and is clueless as to what she should do next, being in a place that isn't exactly buzzing with job opportunities.

Then she gets a job as a care-giver for Will Traynor (Claflin), a 35-year-old who became a quadriplegic after an accident. She has no prior experience and has no idea what to expect from the job but has a bit of help from Will's male nurse, Nathan (Peacocke).

The job starts out a bit shaky, as Will is grumpy, sarcastic and unwilling to receive help but, over time, he softens thanks to her quirky charm. They get to know each other better and – yes, predictably – start to fall for each other.

Then Lou discovers something that she finds very hard to handle. Will had attempted suicide before and still wants to end his life, albeit with a little help this time round. He had promised his parents six months, after which he would go to Dignitas, an assisted suicide organisation.

Everyone close to Will knows about this but it's shocking news to Lou and, with only a couple of months left till this event takes place, she decides to try to change his mind by showing him that his life is worth living.

So she does all the research, books all the tickets, and shows him the time of his life – at least what she thinks is the time of his life. From a day at the horse races to a night of classical music to a holiday abroad, she does all she can to show him that he can still have a fun and fulfilling life as a quadriplegic and that he should change that date that he has with Dignitas.

And, along the way, Will also ends up showing her that life is for living and that she should aim higher and get out of this small town and chase her dreams. So does she succeed or does Will go on with his plan? No spoilers here, you'll have to watch the movie to find out.

Touching on serious subjects like living life as a quadriplegic and the issue of assisted suicide, this movie isn't as flighty as you'd expect it to be. Yes, it has received flak from disability rights campaigners, but it also teaches the viewer a thing or two about how we should all just go out there and live our lives.

Having read the book when it came out a few years ago, this reviewer was very keen on watching this movie and, in that respect, it doesn't disappoint. The lead characters especially are exactly as you'd imagine Lou and Will to be, while reading the book. This is probably because its author, Jojo Moyes, also wrote the screenplay, and therefore kept the vision and feel of the book. Thank goodness they didn't decide to Americanise it as its English wit and charm is very much a big part of why this story is so lovable.

It's fair to say that Clarke and Claflin do justice to their characters and should be applauded for that. Clarke is best known for *Game Of Thrones* but this is certainly a different kind of role for her. Claflin proves once again, as he did in *Love Rosie*, that he is very well equipped to be the new English heartthrob and romantic lead, even if he's mostly recognised for his role in the *Hunger Games* movies.

Summary: With a somewhat serious subject matter, even with some predictable romantic cliches thrown in, *Me Before You* is a charming flick that is guaranteed to bring a tear to your eye – unless you're terribly cynical. Or a man.

Balvinder Sandhu

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: OUT OF THE SHADOWS





Genre: Action/Adventure **Director**: David Green **Cast**: Pete Ploszek, Alan Ritchson, Noel Fisher, Jeremy Howard, Megan Fox, Stephen Amell, Will Arnett, William Fichtner, Brian Tee, Tyler Perry, Gary Anthony Williams, Stephen "Sheamus" Farrelly, Brad Garrett, Brittany Ishibashi, Laura Linney, Danny Woodburn, Tony Shalhoub
Runtime: 1 hr 52 mins **Rating**: TBA **Opens**: 2 June 2016

RATING ★★★☆☆

The world's most fearsome fighting team have returned to fend off threats old and new – and now, they're at least a little frustrated that they can't take credit for it. The brothers Leonardo (Ploszek), Raphael (Ritchson), Michelangelo (Fisher) and Donatello (Howard) have remained in the shadows after defeating Shredder (Tee) a year ago, knowing they will be branded as monsters and reviled. Instead, former cameraman Vern Fenwick (Arnett) is getting all the glory as a New York hero. April O'Neil (Fox) discovers that scientist Baxter Stockman (Perry) is in cahoots with Shredder. After helping Shredder escape from custody, Stockman helps him create mutants of his own: warthog Bebop (Williams) and rhinoceros Rocksteady (Sheamus). Adding to the imminent danger is the alien Krang (Garrett), who plans to open a portal above New York to invade our world. It's a good thing then that April and the Turtles have a new ally in the form of Casey Jones (Amell), corrections officer by day, hockey-stick-wielding vigilante by night.

2014's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was not exactly well-received by critics or fans, but a follow-up was inevitable. This time, Dave Green (*Earth to Echo*) has replaced Jonathan Liebesman in the director's chair, though the lack of a discernible difference is a sign that the producers, led by Michael Bay, have a particularly strong hand in the proceedings. The tone and style remains pretty much the same from the 2014 movie, with the incorporation of fan-favourite characters and elements of *Turtles* lore in the hope of winning back the shellheads who were spurned by the previous outing. It's hard to criticise something like this for being 'silly', since it can be argued that the silliness is intentional. However, *Out of the Shadows* frequently crosses the line from 'silly' to 'stupid'. As we said in our review of the previous movie, *Guardians of the Galaxy* demonstrated how to do an exuberantly tongue-in-cheek sci-fi action flick loaded with pop culture references while not being embarrassingly juvenile. *Guardians of the Galaxy*, this most certainly is not.

The Turtles' designs haven't grown on us, we've just gotten a little less bothered by it over time. The computer-generated characters are integrated into the live-action environments nicely enough and the visual effects work, while sometimes conspicuous, is generally good. The interpretations of Bebop, Rocksteady and Krang do look acceptable. The action sequences will entertain younger viewers and the involvement of second unit director/stunt coordinator Spiro Razatos (the *Fast and Furious* movies, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*) is a plus. However, nothing strikes us as particularly memorable and the climax with aliens invading New York is quite the yawn, at once too similar to the conclusion of the 2014 movie and to the ending of *The Avengers* – not to mention any other movie in which extra-terrestrial invaders have seized the Big Apple.

Perhaps the most positive thing about this film, as with its immediate predecessor, is that our heroes have fun saving the day. Sure, Raph is prone to brooding, but on the whole, they enjoy saving the day and at least a little bit of that is infectious. Characterisation remains paper-thin – the conflict that brews between the brothers is predictable, as is its eventual resolution. While they are sufficiently distinct from each other, not much of an attempt is made to flesh these characters out. It sounds absurd to ask for depth from *TMNT*, but several of the cartoons, including the current show on Nickelodeon, have succeeded in giving the characters personalities past the single-line descriptions from the theme song.

Fox remains a poor choice for the role of April O'Neil, and while it is a silly thing to whine about, the character doesn't even have her signature red hair. There's a lot of unnecessary leering at Fox and the abbreviated schoolgirl get-up she dons early in the film is a cringe-worthy moment of fan-service. Even the most ardent fans of *Arrow* would be hard-pressed to deny that Amell isn't a particularly skilled actor, and his turn as Casey Jones is pretty stiff when the character should be effortlessly cool. He does handle the action beats well, having years of playing a comic book hero under his belt. Perry hams it up as Baxter Stockman, playing him as little more than the, well, stock dweeby scientist. Perry ignores anything interesting about the character, instead becoming yet another comic relief sidekick. It's also not like he needs the money. Finally, it is truly disheartening to see three-time Oscar nominee Laura Linney absolutely slumming it here.

Several of the casting changes are nominal improvements – Brian Tee steps in for Tohoru Masamune as Shredder while Brittany Ishibashi replaces Minae Noji as his chief henchwoman Karai. William Fichtner was set to reprise his role as Eric Sacks, though it appears his scenes have been left on the cutting room floor. If you're able to either overlook or revel in the childishness that runs through most of the movie, it is occasionally entertaining. However, if your tolerance for clunky dialogue, embarrassing jokes and generic action is particularly low, *Out of the Shadows* will try your patience to no end.

Summary: About on par with the 2014 film, *Out of the Shadows* is immensely silly and difficult to get into, but its titular heroes are intermittently endearing and the introduction of key players from the comics and cartoons is a half-step in the right direction.

Jedd Jong

YOUNG & FABULOUS
最佳伙扮

Genre: Comedy **Director**: Joyce Lee, Michael Woo
Cast: Aloysius Pang, Joshua Tan, Joyce Chu, Jeffrey Xu, Gurmit Singh, Henry Thia, Quan Yi Fong, Jordan Ng, The Sam Willows
Runtime: 1 hr 47 mins **Rating**: PG (Some Coarse Language)
Opens: 26 May 2016

RATING ★★★☆☆





This comedy plunges us into the world of sewing machines, oversized foam swords, flowing robes and lots of make-up: the local cosplay scene. Royston (Pang) is a shy, top-scoring student with social anxiety. His mother Mei Feng (Quan) intends for him to become a doctor, but Royston dreams of being a fashion designer with his own label in Japan. Royston tailors costumes for the local cosplay community. His friend and client Chen Jun (Xu), who cross-dresses as female characters, eventually convinces Royston to try cosplaying himself. Royston secretly nurses a crush on his classmate Violet (Chu), a conceited social media darling from an affluent family. Royston's best friend Hao Ren (Tan), an enterprising smooth-talker, encourages Royston's pursuit of his hobby. Royston, Violet and Hao Ren eventually form a cosplaying team, while facing opposition from all sides. Mr. Boo (Singh), the school's stern Discipline Master, is none too pleased that his students are diverting their attention away from their studies. Will passion conquer all, or will reality stomp on their dreams?

It's perfectly understandable that actual cosplayers would be wary of *Young & Fabulous*. After all, the hobby has often been misunderstood and thus misrepresented by those on the outside. As with any circle of enthusiasts, there are figures in the local cosplay who are admired for their craftsmanship and others who have gained notoriety for some reason or another, with a surprising amount of politicking in between. Anyway, it's most helpful to think of *Young & Fabulous* not as a movie about cosplay, but as a comedy-drama which uses the hobby as a textural element. The themes in the film are not explored with great depth, but they are readily relatable. Almost any Singaporean with artistic inclinations knows what it's like to be reminded by their parents that one won't be able to make a stable income outside of being a doctor/lawyer/accountant.

As with many commercial Singaporean films, *Young & Fabulous* is sorely lacking in subtlety. The stylistic flourishes that include daydream sequences filled with deliberately cheesy visual effects, or comedy sound effects and on-screen graphics reminiscent of those one would see in an anime, tend to be a little too silly. However, barring one extremely jarring tonal shift, the balance between the comedy and drama tends to work. This reviewer was moved by several scenes, and there's also a reveal in the final act that's a real gut-punch. While it's far from a nuanced portrayal of the cosplay scene, a great many actual cosplayers were involved in the making of the film, and if you're in that community, you'll recognise at least a couple of familiar faces in the crowd scenes. In addition to the standard blooper reel, the end credits also feature short interviews with actual cosplayers, including a pilot, a lawyer and an engineer, who explain what drew them to the hobby.

Pang, one of local Chinese-language television's 'Eight Dukes', is eminently endearing and easy to root for as the shy, stuttering underdog who eventually comes into his own. There are several moments when he dials the awkwardness up to 11 and it feels like an affectation, but that can be probably chalked up to a directorial choice as well. Nevertheless, there's a depth of sincerity to his performance here. When Royston breaks down in tears, it is genuinely heart-rending. *Ah Boys to Men* star Tan is immensely likeable and charming, when the character could've been plenty obnoxious. Hao Ren is an experienced huckster who's opportunistic, but never at the expense of looking out for his friends, and seems like a pretty awesome wingman to have around.

Malaysian singer Chu makes her acting debut in this film. Unfortunately, she has to bury her innate sweetness beneath layers of a princess complex. As far as female leads go, Violet is







surprisingly catty and unkind, which brings us to the conclusion that Royston is really only drawn to her looks. There is an attempt to justify Violet's behaviour by way of her snooty parents, played by Constance Song and Bernard Tan, but there's far from enough character development if we're expected to view Violet as a decent human being by the end of the movie.

Singh makes a departure from his typically over-the-top comedic roles as the no-nonsense Mr. Boo, who seems the be the only teacher in the school. He gets to shine in a scene opposite Henry Thia, who plays Hao Ren's father Hao Lian (a homonym for the Mandarin term for 'boastful'), with Hao Ren translating for the two. Quan's character, with her heart set on crushing her children's dreams and who is prone to labelling her younger son Jordan (Jordan Ng) as 'dumb', is easy to dislike. However, it turns out that the film offers very compelling reasons for her actions and attitude, and while its exploration of parent-child tendencies may be very on-the-nose, it's a relationship that this reviewer did get invested in. Quan also has a gem of a comedic scene in which she gives a speech to a sausage. We will not provide the context for this lest we ruin the joke.

Xu, fellow 'Duke' to Pang, steals the show as the flamboyant Chen Jun, the *de facto* gay best friend whose sexual orientation is strongly hinted at but never referred to directly. Xu is having a ball of a time, and quite heartenningly, the film does not mock the character's crossdressing outright. Sure, more than a few laughs are had at his expense, but he's also made out to be confident and talented at his chosen hobby. Also look out for the members of indie band *The Sam Willows*, who cameo as school bullies.

Young & Fabulous is surprisingly bereft of conspicuous product placement, a pitfall that affects many Singaporean films. There is a bottle of chicken essence with *its label actually obscured*. Co-directors Lee and Woo may not have portrayed the cosplay scene with utmost accuracy, but their intentions to depict the passion and craftsmanship that goes into the hobby cannot be faulted. Similarly, the difficulties faced by any young Singaporean in realising their artistic endeavours do make for adequately dramatic material.

Summary: Dressed to the sixes and sevens, rather than to the nines – what it lacks in subtlety, it somewhat makes up for in humour and heart.

Jedd Jong

THE ANGRY BIRDS MOVIE

Genre: Animation **Director**: Fergal Reilly, Clay Kaytis
Cast: Jason Sudeikis, Josh Gad, Danny McBride, Maya Rudolph, Bill Hader, Peter Dinklage, Kate McKinnon, Sean Penn, Tony Hale, Keegan-Michael Key, Blake Shelton **Runtime**: 97 mins
Rating: PG **Opens**: 26 May 2016

RATING ★★★☆☆







Red feathers at morning, pigs take warning. In this animated comedy, we become acquainted with Red (Sudeikis), a resident of Bird Island who has trouble keeping his temper in check. After a particularly bad flare-up, Judge Peckinpah (Key) sentences Red to anger management classes. The classes are conducted by Matilda (Rudolph), and Red eventually befriends the jittery Chuck (Gad), Bomb (McBride), prone to literally exploding when he gets upset, and the gigantic, constantly growling Terence (Penn). Out of the blue, Bird Island receives visitors in the form of green pigs, led by Leonard (Hader). Claiming to be peaceful explorers, the newcomers are received with open arms by all of Bird Island's residents – apart from Red, who harbours his suspicions. Red is proven right when it turns out that the pigs intend to steal and eat all of the birds' eggs. Red, Chuck and Bomb seek the advice of the Mighty Eagle (Dinklage), a mythical hero whose glory days are far behind him. In retaliation, the denizens of Bird Island stage an attack on Piggy Island to rescue their unborn offspring.

The Angry Birds Movie is an adaptation of the mobile game developed by Rovio, which became a cultural phenomenon around five or six years ago. Beyond the point that this might be flapping its way into theatres a tad late, there is another elephant bird in the room. Large swathes of the internet are convinced that the film is a thinly-veiled anti-immigration screed. It seems far-fetched that a kids' movie based on a puzzle game might be politicised, but it's not absurd on its face. The villains are insidious foreigners with a hidden agenda, their leader is sporting a curly beard, they arrive bearing gifts and the promise of peace, and our hero is the one guy who suspects all is not as it seems. Alternatively, it's an anti-colonialist message, with the pigs as the conquistadors who have arrived to bamboozle the locals and make off with their resources. Naturally, the makers of the film won't confirm or deny the hypotheses outright. It slingshots right over the heads of the young target audience, but it's something to mull over – or just chuckle about – all the same.

Past the possible political commentary, *Angry Birds* is very much a serviceable, run-of-the-mill animated comedy. There are reasonably well-known comic actors in the voice cast, cloyingly cutesy baby characters, getting-crap-past-the-radar jokes to make the adults snicker, and the inclusion of pop songs aplenty. The birds might be flightless, but a surprisingly high number of the jokes land. Amidst the more questionable gags, like a *Fifty Shades of Grey* reference and scatological humour, there's a litany of groan-inducing puns – think "Kevin Bacon in Hamlet", "Calvin Swine underwear" and "The Birds and the Bees Fertility Clinic". Screenwriter Jon Vitti is a *Simpsons* alum who also penned the first two *Alvin and the Chipmunks* movies, so one kind of knows what to expect jokes-wise. There is a niggling sense that a lot of the jokes were cooked up by a writer's room of stand-up comics roped in to do a last-minute punch-up. It's also not terribly original: one scene borrows the "most annoying sound" joke from *Dumb and Dumber*, while another lifts the Quicksilver kitchen sequence from *X-Men: Days of Future Past* wholesale.

Angry Birds may be markedly unsophisticated, but its protagonist does go a good way to making it work. Red is flawed, a bitterly anti-social loner whose deep-seated issues stem from a childhood of neglect (he was orphaned) and bullying. Sudeikis doesn't phone it in and ends up being pretty engaging as Red, allowing the viewer to sympathise with his myriad frustrations. Gad essentially reprises Olaf from *Frozen*, while McBride is reasonably cuddly as the gentle giant who just can't help his outbursts. Dinklage is an absolute hoot as the Mighty Eagle, a widely-admired Wizard of Oz type who turns out to be out of shape and comically ineffectual – wait, the Bald Eagle is the national bird of which country, again?

Hader could stand to be a little – yes, we're going there – hammier in his role as the big bad of the piece. Leonard and his fellow pigs want to *consume unborn children* – it would've been interesting to see the movie acknowledge just how dark this is. And hiring Oscar-winner Penn to grunt and growl seems even more puzzling than having Vin Diesel's only lines be: "I am Groot". Penn taped all his, uh, 'dialogue' in one recording session and co-director Clay Kaytis openly admits it was stunt-casting. Apparently, the film's executive producer David Maisel is a friend of Penn's and reached out to him. Penn, enjoying an early cut of the film (and probably not wanting to pass up the incredibly easy pay cheque), signed on.

Angry Birds is sufficiently colourful, fast-paced and funny, such that parents won't be tearing out their hair – though it's likely they won't genuinely enjoy it. It is what it is, a franchise-ready animated movie made by committee, and it really could've turned out significantly worse.

Summary: It's an animated movie as ordered via corporate mandate, but *The Angry Birds Movie* does pack in the jokes and some lively animation. Have meaningful post-movie discussions with your kids about the supposed anti-immigration sentiment in the movie at your own risk.

Jedd Jong

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

Genre: Action/Adventure **Director**: Bryan Singer **Cast**: James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender, Jennifer Lawrence, Oscar Isaac, Nicholas Hoult, Rose Byrne, Olivia Munn, Evan Peters, Kodi Smit-McPhee, Sophie Turner, Tye Sheridan, Alexandra Shipp, Lucas Till, Josh Helman, Lana Condor, Ben Hardy **Runtime**: 2 hrs 25 mins **Rating**: PG13 (Violence & Brief Coarse Language) **Opens**: 19 May 2016

RATING ★★½☆☆







It's hard to fault anyone for approaching *X-Men: Apocalypse* with optimism. 20th Century Fox has consistently failed the Fantastic Four, but they've had a better track record in recent years with Marvel's mutants. We've been #blessed with Bryan Singer's *Days Of Future Past*, a brainy, bold thrill ride that uses its myriad characters to excellent effect in telling a time-twisted tale of doom and… well, apocalypse. Tim Miller's snarky, wacky *Deadpool* proved without a doubt that the studio is willing to take a risk on a cult property and let it explode all over the silver screen, rather than neuter it out of hand. With Singer back on board and a top-notch cast, hopes are understandably high for the cataclysmic confrontation suggested by the title of this latest entry in the *X-Men* franchise.

We're even promised the holy grail of X-Men villains: ancient mutant Apocalypse (Oscar Isaac, buried under too many layers of make-up and prosthetics). This righteous blue-hued dude, with his huge but poorly defined power-set, is an iconic antagonist for our band of superheroes in the comics: he's been known to lay waste to Earth in the past, present and future. In Singer's incarnation, Apocalypse's Four Horsemen include wing-tipped Angel (Ben Hardy); weather witch Storm (Alexandra Shipp); energy-blade-wielding Psylocke (Olivia Munn); and a bitter, broken Magneto/Erik Lensherr (Michael Fassbender).

It's up to Professor Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) and his X-Men – superpowered students that include younger versions of uber-powerful Jean Grey (Sophie Turner) and Cyclops/Scott Summers (Tye Sheridan) – to stop Apocalypse from claiming the entire world for himself. Along the way, shape-shifter Raven/Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence) must decide just how she can best contribute to the mutant cause in which she so firmly believes.

Here's the thing: keep your expectations low – lower – lowest – and *X-Men: Apocalypse* may just pass muster. This is a cookie-cutter blockbuster, sliced and diced together with more efficiency than heart. It dutifully ticks boxes as it chugs along: Apocalypse recruits his acolytes. Magneto loses his heart and soul (again). Charles and Raven discuss and disagree on tactics. Superheroes face off. It's all strung together with several sequences of world-destroying action, filmed in true Roland Emmerich style.

Devotees of both the movies and the comics will find things to enjoy: a twitchy, endearing young Nightcrawler (Kodi Smit-McPhee), who looks very much like a demon but is deeply devout; another deeply amusing explosion of special effects as fan favourite Quicksilver (Evan Peters) zips through a hilarious rescue mission; and an already publicised cameo by Wolverine (Hugh Jackman) that will drive fans berserk.

But think a little harder or poke at its shaky plot, and *X-Men Apocalypse* falls apart quite readily. The truth is that much of this film is neither inspired nor inspiring. It's okay, for the most part, but it's never great, and barely ever good. Simon Kinberg's script is a limp affair, recycling bits that worked better in other movies in the franchise but breaking very little new ground. The stakes are insanely high, but the threat never feels genuine – a feeling that is only reinforced by the clumsy and anti-climactic way in which the final showdown takes place. Can we say *deus ex machina*? Yes, we can.

The character work that lends so much emotion and power to earlier installments like *First Class* and *Days Of Future Past* is missing here too. Too much of the story relies on emotional connections that aren't established too well, and which can only be supplied by the viewers themselves. The film meanders without much purpose through its many relationships, staging a series of first meetings or reunions that basically amount to: Jean and Cyclops meet cute! Charles and Moira MacTaggert (Rose Byrne) meet cute! Raven and Hank McCoy (Nicholas Hoult) meet cute!

But very little of it sparks to life and there's a troubling disregard for female agency, too, that fuels Magneto's entire emotional arc in this film. We're also told why Moira disappeared in between films, but she's not given any time to forgive what she has had to forget.

At least Singer's cast does good work with what little they are given. As a re-energised Charles, McAvoy is as appealing and charming as ever. Fassbender remains a gift to the franchise: he imbues Erik with the perfect blend of heartbreak and hatred, which serves as a potent reminder of why he makes a far better antagonist than the automaton-on-evil-autopilot that is Apocalypse. In the context of the film, Lawrence delivers a decent performance. But it's still hard to shake the feeling that she's miscast in the role, with her explosive star power prompting the filmmakers to transform Raven into someone pretty much unrecognisable to comic readers.

In just eight years, the genre that was once treated as the difficult bastard stepchild of the movie industry has come fully into its own. It's only May and we've already seen three superhero films hit cinemas – *Captain America: Civil War*: excellent; *Deadpool*: awesome; *Batman v Superman*: awful. This latest installment in the *X-Men* franchise falls on neither extreme. It displays a couple of flashes of brilliance, but not enough to drag it out from the uncomfortable middle ground of mediocrity it occupies. Here's hoping Singer (if he signs on to direct) and Kinberg find their footing again with the inevitable follow-up to *X-Men: Apocalypse* – we've already been told that it will be set in the '90s, with a rather obscure end-credits scene teasing just where the franchise will go next.

Summary: The latest *X-Men* film isn't completely dreadful, but you may be tempted to cancel the Apocalypse after watching it.

Shawne Wang

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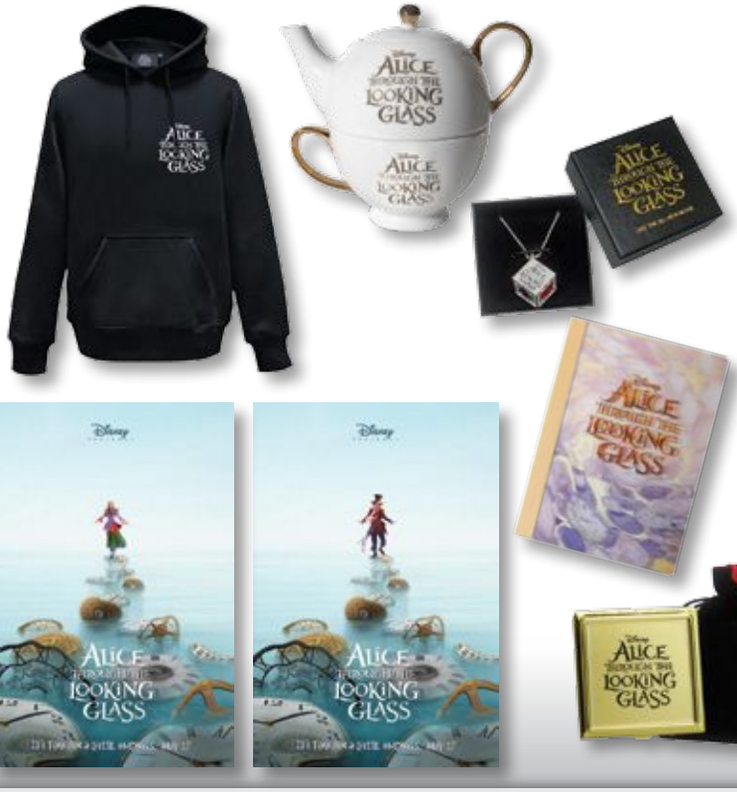
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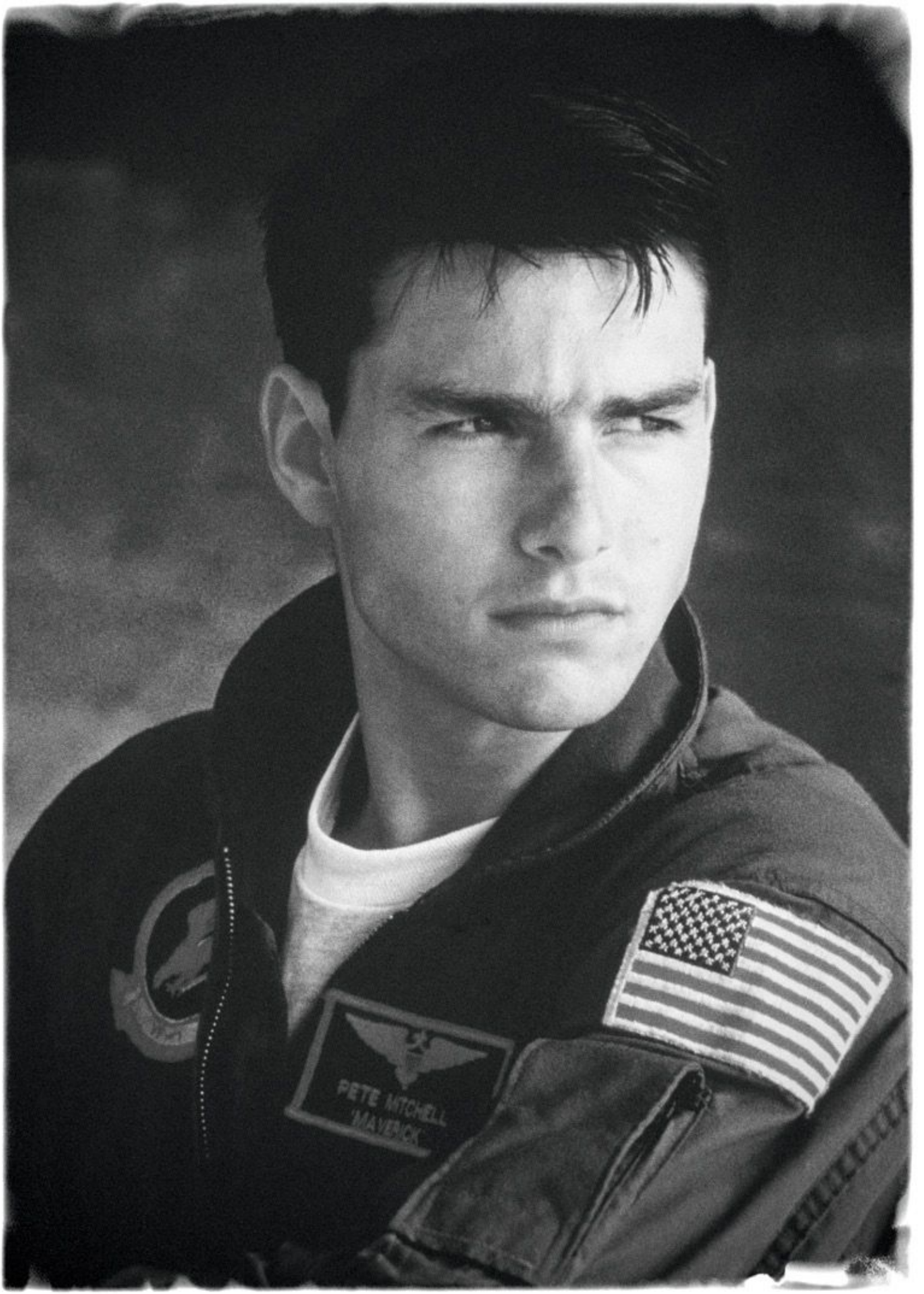
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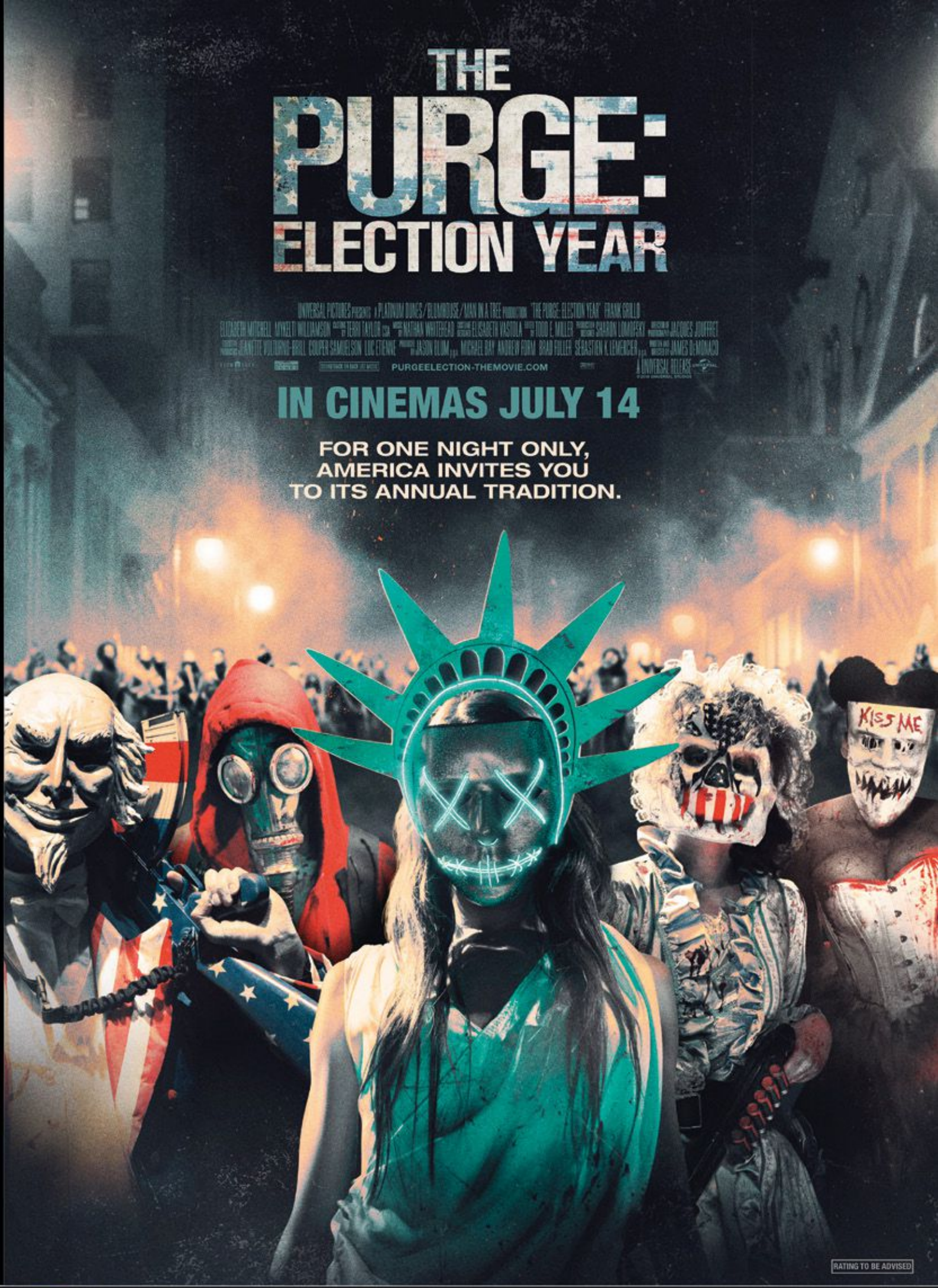
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